

A MODEL FATHER.

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Edwin Leach,

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# A MODEL FATHER

ETC.

By DAVID CHRISTIE MURRAY

AUTHOR OF "JOSEPH'S COAT," ETC.



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A MODEL FATHER.



# A MODEL FATHER.

## CHAPTER I.

A PRETTY girl was standing in an English lane drawing patterns in the dust with the point of a parasol, and bending over her work with an undeceptive pretence of interest. A handsome young man was looking on, apparently more interested in the girl than in the patterns.

"My last picture sold for twenty pounds," said the young man, "and I painted it in a fortnight. That's at the rate of five hundred a year. We could live on that, surely."

The pretty girl went on tracing patterns in the dust, and answered nothing.

"I don't mean to say I make as much as that at present," said the young fellow, "but there's an average. If you'd only say 'Yes,' I'd work like a nigger."

She murmured that he worked too hard already, still with her face bent over that futile labour in the dust.

“Not half so hard,” he answered, “as I can work, as I will work, if only you’ll say ‘Yes.’”

The girl studied her patterns with her head on one side, so as to give her lover a view of the top of her coquettish little hat, while she smiled. The young man moved a little nearer, and then a little nearer still. Next he put an arm about her waist, and drew her to him very gently. She, still more gently, made a movement as if to unwind his arm, and perhaps at first she meant it, but finding him too strong or too determined, she submitted, and allowed it to rest there.

“Say ‘Yes,’” murmured the young man, bending downwards and sideways to get past the obstructive coquettish little hat. But its crown was so obstinately presented to him that he had to throw away the cane he carried, and seize her hand with the hand thus set at liberty, before he could turn her round. Matters were so far mended then that he could see the extremely neat parting of her glossy brown hair, with a loose escaping curl on either side the forehead. Grown insolent by this time, he set a finger under her chin, and raised her face slowly, though her eyes were still fixed on those foolish patterns at her feet, and the point of the parasol still went tracing about among them, guided by the disengaged hand. She felt no temptation to smile now, but was on the contrary, wonderfully serious.

"Say 'Yes,'" murmured the young man again. His persistence could scarcely have frightened or distressed her, it was so gentle, yet a tear rolled down each flushed cheek and dropped, star-shaped, among the dusty lines. The young man did what many young men would have done under the circumstances. He kissed the traces of the tears, and drew the girl a little closer. "Say 'Yes,'" he murmured again.

Shakespeare (who was not wholly ignorant of the cycle of experience on which these two young people were entering) has written that "to hear with eyes belongs to Love's fine wit." And at this, the third time of asking, the lover saw the maid's lips shape the word, though it came so faintly it failed to reach his ears, near as he was to her.

She escaped in a while with the glossy brown hair somewhat disordered, and the coquettish hat a trifle on one side. The young man took up the walking cane he had thrown down a minute or two before; the girl shyly accepted his proffered arm; and they walked away together. The two star-shaped tear-drops lay in the dust amid the tangled lines.

"Dear eyes," said the happy lover, "they shall never shed another tear if I can help it."

“Jack,” said the girl, “you must be quiet—you must really. I shall be quite a fright.” Her little gloved hands arranged the coquettish hat and the escaping curls again, and what with that action (which, though simple, was remarkably pretty and engaging to look at), and what with the pride, and shyness, and tenderness in her eyes, she looked altogether so bewitching that the hat was somehow disarranged again, and the curls peeped out more wantonly than ever. But after this the young man called Jack consented to keep a watch upon himself, the more easily perhaps because a near curve in the lane brought several cottages in sight.

For perhaps two minutes after the lovers had rounded this curve the lane kept its summer evening stillness. The sun was setting in a clear glory of amber, and the birds, for the most part, were going to bed, and were silent. Only here and there a convivial finch who was inclined to late hours chaunted a rollicking stave or two; but even these roysterers were sleepy, and deep tranquillity was settling on the fields. A face rose over the hedge which bounded the lane on the sunset side, a face on which the signs of many conflicting emotions were plainly inscribed. A voice, deep, rich, and husky, broke upon the evening stillness.

"Cassio," said the voice, "I love thee. But never more be officer of mine."

"Cassio be hanged!" said another voice; "who is the fellow?"

"A brother of Appelles," answered the man with the rich bass voice.

"And who is *he*?"

"I would indicate," said the bass-voiced man, "that the fellow is a painter. His name is Cameron, and—

'The poor soul would fain deny, but dares not,—

my daughter called him Jack."

With this the speaker came upon the road, and was immediately followed by his companion. The man with the bass voice was tall and inclined to be portly. He was dressed with an air of rigid propriety in well-fitting glossy black broadcloth. He displayed a good deal of stiff high collar, and a good deal of stiff white shirt-cuff. His boots and his hat shone splendidly, and his black kid gloves and black satin stock were so new that they also beamed, though with a milder lustre. He had a square, pale face, with very movable eyebrows, black and strongly marked. His cheeks were bluish-grey with close shaving, and his nose was a pale magenta. When a sentence or two had cleared the bass voice of

its huskiness it was a very fine one, and its owner seemed to take a prodigious pride in it, and to relish it, as if it had been a fine old port or generous Burgundy. Whenever he came to a quotation—even though it expressed the deepest misery—there was a lurking look of cheerfulness upon him, and a furtive note of joy sounded in the magnificent bass voice. It was plain that he was annoyed, and it was just as clear that the possession and employment of the magnificent voice consoled him.

His companion was a lad of two or three-and-twenty, with a conspicuously graceful figure, and a conspicuously vacant face. His features, like his hands and feet, were small and delicate, and his face was as smooth as an egg, in spite of assiduous shaving.

The man with the voice was Mr. Montgomery Bassett, the well known tragedian, and the other was one George Weatherley, the only representative of an old house in those parts. He had lands and houses, and money in the funds, old plate and old wines in plenty, roomy and well-stocked stables, and whatever else the ownership of which is popularly supposed to help to make life pleasant.

“Look here, Mr. Bassett,” said the youngster who was pale and perturbed, “you must have

had some sort of a notion about this, you know."

"No," said the eminent tragedian. "Like Desdemon, she hath deceived her father." He laid both gloved hands upon his broad-cloth breast and sighed so heavily that he shrugged his shoulders. He enjoyed the quotation so profoundly, in a mournful and despondent way, that he repeated it in a hollow murmur, dropping his hands listlessly at his sides to express spiritual lassitude following on the shock of discovery.

"I'll tell you what it is," said the youngster; "it's a horribly caddish thing for a fellow like that to stand in a girl's light— isn't it? Suppose his dam pictures didn't sell? He'd have to starve, now, wouldn't he, by Jingo? Then she'd be nice and happy wouldn't she, now, Mr. Bassett, wouldn't she?"

"You are quite right, dear boy;" said Mr. Bassett. Jack Cameron, who was a fairly prosperous young painter, would have seemed a good-enough match for his daughter, a month ago. But circumstances alter cases. Jack had neither lands, nor houses, nor money in the funds, nor old plate, nor old wines. Mr. Weatherley was decidedly the more promising son-in-law of the two.

"Now, if she married me," pursued young Weatherley, blushing and stammering somewhat, "she'd be well off, now, wouldn't she? And she's never been on the stage yet, and what she was going to do isn't anything to anybody, is it? And the wife takes the husband's position, doesn't she, Mr. Bassett? And I'm my own master, and over age, and there isn't anybody who could control me, is there?"

"Nobody, dear boy, nobody," said the eminent tragedian mournfully.

"Look here, Mr. Bassett," the youngster began again; "you can't have any engagements on a Sunday evening. You come over to my place, now, and let us talk things over and see what is to be done. I'm not going to be beaten by a fellow like that; and I'm my own master, and nobody can dictate to me about my choice, can they, now?"

"It is a pity, dear boy," said Mr. Montgomery Bassett, with ponderous solemnity, "that you never spoke out until this evening."

"Well," said young Weatherley defensively, "I hadn't made up my mind; but I've made it up now, and I thought I'd tell you first, because that was honourable, wasn't it? And then I'd no sooner begun—had I, now?—than that fellow comes spooning Miss Bassett along the lane, on the other side of the hedge, confound him!

Who asked him to shove *his* nose in, I should like to know? *I* didn't." The fact that Mr. Cameron had not waited for his invitation seemed to wound the young man deeply. "But I say, look here, Mr. Bassett," he continued, "you're not going to stand this, are you? Because I'm not, I can tell you."

"I admire your spirit, dear boy," returned Mr. Bassett, "and whatever influence I have shall be exerted in your cause. But I am a father, and though I am but a poor stroller,"—he rolled his r's at this point with a long-drawn exaggeration of humility,—"and by Act of Parliament a vagabond, I have a father's heart. I cannot force the inclinations of my child."

Young Weatherley took a gloomy view of Mr. Bassett, and began to switch in a savage fashion at the flowers along the banks of the lane. Coming in a little while upon a gateway, where a mouldering old heraldic lion ramped at nothing across a time-eaten shield, they entered and walking up a wide and trimly-gravelled drive, approached a handsome mansion of warm brown stone, beautiful with ivy and many-coloured mosses. Mr. Montgomery Bassett looked on this desirable freehold mansion for the first time, and, it is curious and worthy of remark that the beauty of young Weatherley's residence made

Jack Cameron's advances to Miss Bassett look almost criminal and shameful. The inside of the house confirmed this shadowy and half-formed opinion. The furniture of black oak, or mahogany liquidly lustrous with two hundred years of polish, the magnificent pier-glasses, the rich hangings, the subdued gold of ancient picture-frames, the yielding carpets, one and all accused Jack Cameron with such assured voices, that his sweetheart's father began to hold the meanest opinion of him. He thought of his daughter living here as the legal mistress of all these splendours, and of himself as a frequent and honoured guest. He positively *saw* a visiting card, of the best ivory cardboard, on which was inscribed in neat copper-plate characters, curly as to the capital letters—"Mrs. Weatherley, The Grange, Oakenham." He stuck this trophy, in fancy, into the frame of a pier glass in his London lodgings, and saw many envious tragedians and comedians looking at it. All this, like other dreams, lasted scarce a second.

"It's a nice little box of a place, isn't it, Mr. Bassett?" said the host.

"Charming, dear boy, charming," responded the eminent actor, speaking with some effusion. "It needs but one thing to complete its beauties"

"What's that?" asked Mr. Weatherley in a less friendly tone.

"The beautifying presence of Woman, dear boy," replied the tragedian in a rumbling murmur.

"You ain't blind, Mr. Bassett, to the advantages of my position, are you?" asked Mr. Weatherley anxiously. "She would be consulting her own interests now, wouldn't she, if she took me in place of that other fellow? And you'd rather see her married to me, wouldn't you?"

"Otherwise," replied the great tragedian (who had once failed as Falstaff, and was therefore familiar with the text), "call me horse." He held out a hand, and Mr. Weatherley accepting it, rather doubtfully at first, thought better of it, and wrung it with a sudden vigour.

"I don't smoke here," said the host; "but I've got a little den upstairs. We shan't be any the less comfortable if we have a cigar and a glass of wine, shall we?" The guest laughed—a mellow peal—and rubbed his hands. "Come this way, Mr. Bassett, and leave your hat in the hall."

Mr. Bassett left his hat in the hall and followed the youngster up-stairs, with a jaunty step. He felt almost as if he were treading the floors of his own ancestral home.

Surely, if the girl could see the house young Weatherley lived in she would have too much wisdom to refuse him! It was, certainly, a splendid chance for any young woman.

Young Weatherley's notion of a glass of wine seemed liberal. In answer to his orders the butler set upon the table a bottle of Burgundy and a bottle of champagne, together with decanters holding port and sherry.

"They're all good, Mr. Bassett," said young Weatherley, "and you can't make a mistake amongst 'em. The cellar's known all over the county."

"Call me Mont, dear boy," said Mr. Bassett, in a sudden glow of friendship; "I hate the formal Mister."

Again a slight air of doubt crossed the host's face.

"I'll call you Bassett," he said, by way of compromise. "Try a weed? They're first-rate, and they've been in the house three years. The governor was a judge of what was good. Now look here—you'll use your influence, wont you?"

"I discern in you, dear boy," said the tragedian, drawing off the brand-new kid gloves and pausing to blow into them, lest

they should wrinkle, "I discern in you qualities which I am persuaded would make a woman happy. But your attachment seems to me—excuse a father's anxiety, dear boy—of very rapid growth."

"No, it isn't, Mr.—no, it isn't, Bassett. You remember that night when you took me to the house dinner at the Cannibal Club, when I called on you next day. That's twelve months ago to-day, isn't it, since I saw her first? That isn't sudden; is it, Bassett? And I've proved that I was in earnest, haven't I? Why, I've travelled more than two thousand miles, and I've seen you in *Coriolanus*, and *Macbeth*, and *Hamlet* till I'm Shakespeare-sick, just to have an excuse to call on you. Haven't I, now?"

This was not altogether complimentary to the eminent tragedian. But, like a father, he bore it for his daughter's sake, and nodded in reply, with a gloomy action of the eyebrows, which seemed to indicate a knowledge of the hell it is in suing long to bide.

"Now, you'll use your influence, wont you Bassett?" asked young Weatherley again. Mr. Bassett having executed an extremely solemn shake-hands, nodded in silence, emptied his champagne glass and resumed his seat. The

cigars were assuredly excellent, and the wine realized his loftiest expectations. The tragedian rather bragged of his judgment in the matter of wines, not altogether without reason, and he thought what a pity it would be if his daughter's refusal of an advantageous match should shut him out from a house in which was kept so praiseworthy a cellar. The appointments of the little room were really luxurious. In the fast-fading light which yet lingered, the guest could see the grounds of the Grange, their trim gardens, wandering walks and lofty trees. And who on earth—he asked himself—was Jack Cameron, that he should stand between him and a partnership in all these joys and splendours? He began to dislike Jack actively.

“You won't allow her to throw herself away on that fellow, will you now, Bassett?” demanded the host. Perhaps, though he was not a young man of very keen perceptions, he had an idea of the direction in which the tragedian's thoughts were travelling. Mr. Bassett sighed.

“The female heart, dear boy,” he answered despondingly, “the female heart.”

“No; but look here, Bassett,” said Mr. Weatherley, “doesn't it stand to reason now, that I'm a better match for her?”

“Compared with him, dear boy,” responded

Mr. Bassett, "your excellence sticks fiery off indeed. He is no more like to you than I to Hercules."

"And he hasn't got such a position to offer her, has he, Bassett?"

"He has not, indeed," replied the tragedian sadly, "he has not, indeed."

Mr. Weatherley in his nervousness made considerable assaults upon the Burgundy, and Mr. Bassett in his appreciation of its qualities made progress with the champagne.

"I'll tell you what, Bassett," said Mr. Weatherley, by-and-by. "That's the last glass in the bottle, and I shall have had enough. And now I'll have it out with you. I'll make you a proposition."

"A moment," said Mr. Bassett. "Port is a warmer vintage than champagne. Your Pomery-Greno is excellent, dear boy, but it leaves a chill within. A little port will act as a corrective. Good wine is a good familiar creature."

The great tragedian's nose had assumed a warmer tone, and his voice was deeper and mellower than ever.

"I say," said Mr. Weatherley dogmatically, "that I've got a proposition. Listen me. If I marry int' your family, I don't marry you's well, do I Bassett?" Mr. Bassett paused in the act of raising his wine-glass to his lips,

and there was an air of some discomfiture upon him. "Now, do I, Bassett?" demanded Mr. Weatherley.

"Certainly not, dear boy," said Mr. Bassett, with outward heartiness.

"Very well, then," continued the host, who kept his eyes open at this time by dint of holding his eyebrows at the top of his forehead; "if you use your influence, you'll expect something, shan't you, Bassett?"

"Sir," cried the actor, "I am unwilling to understand you."

"Then I'll explain," said Mr. Weatherley. "On the day on which I'm married to your daughter—and mind you, Bassett, I'm willing to put this into writing whenever you like—on the day I'm married I'll give you a cheque for a thousand pounds."

"Sir," said the actor, rising from his seat and gulping down his glass of port in an agitated manner. "Am I to regard this as an insult, deliberately planned."

"Eh," said Mr. Weatherley feebly.

"Your manner undeceives me," said Mr. Bassett, gazing with an inquiring look upon his host. "I will not believe that an insult was intended. But, dear boy, you are not yet a father. You can know little of the workings of a father's heart. But you meant

well, dear boy—you meant well, and I forgive you freely. Shake hands, shake hands. Unthread the rude eye of Rebellion and welcome home once more discarded Faith.”

The tragedian spoke in quivering tones, and shook hands, in token of forgiveness, with so stalwart a grasp that Mr. Weatherley writhed out of his chair with a somewhat ghastly smile.

“Wass the matter?” he inquired dreamily, as he resumed his seat. Mr. Bassett filled and emptied his glass before the fatherly agitation of his spirit had subsided.

“You are young, dear boy,” he answered, “and you cannot understand a father’s feelings. I cannot bargain to sell my child for lucre.”

“Bassett,” said Mr. Weatherley, with vinous tears, “I’m afraid I’ve made most ungentlemanly proposition” (he called it ulgemptly prition, but Mr. Bassett understood him and nodded a mournful but forgiving assent); “now didn’t I, Bassett? And I feel ashamed of myself, and so I ought to, oughtn’t I, Bassett?”

“Say no more, dear boy,” cried Mr. Bassett warmly, “say no more.”

“You’re a noble fellow, Bassett,” said Mr. Weatherley. “Have some wine.” After renewed hand-shakings Mr. Bassett had some wine, and Mr. Weatherley joined him.

"In this I bury all unkindness, Cassius," said Mr. Bassett, as he touched glasses with his young friend. The butler entering with the lamp at this juncture, Mr. Weatherley demanded more wine, and the man, with an incredulous look at the empty bottles, obeyed the order. In the presence of the light the young gentleman began to blink, owl-like, and in a little while he fell asleep. The elder gentleman smoked and drank with a luxurious air until the decanter of port had yielded its last drop. He then made one or two ineffectual attempts to arouse his host, and finally rang the bell.

"Your young master," he said, addressing the butler, "is slightly unwell. He will be all right in the morning. Upon occasion," he continued, "this is pardonable," waving his hand at Mr. Weatherley's recumbent figure, on which all Mr. Weatherley's garments were making a wrinkled progress towards his shoulders. "As a continuous practice it is to be condemned. You behold in me, young man, one long past the prime of life, and as sound as a trout. For—what saith old Adam?—

'In my youth I never did apply  
Hot and rebellious liquors to my blood,  
And so mine age is like a lusty winter,  
Frosty but kindly.'

I will call and pay my respects to Mr. Weatherley in the morning."

"Very sing'lar sort o' party," said the butler, gazing after him as he went with jaunty swagger down the stairs.

"A thousand pounds is a nice round sum, no doubt," said Mr. Bassett, as he lit one of his host's cigars. He had taken the precaution to secure a handful before ringing for the butler. "A thousand pounds is a nice round sum, no doubt," said Mr. Bassett, "but an annuity would be preferable—decidedly."

## CHAPTER II.

MR. WILLIAM CASSIDY was over head and heels in love. The fact that this was, and had been for some sixteen or eighteen years, his customary condition effected no abatement in his present joys and sorrows. He had not hitherto approved himself as a faithful or a constant swain, but whilst the tender passion lasted it absorbed him completely until he was out of sight of the lady, or in extreme cases for some half hour afterwards. That he was single at thirty years of age was his fortune, but his fault by no means. He had excited the tenderest sentiments in the breasts of many young women in various ranks of life—he had proposed to a dozen and been accepted by some of them; twice he had bought the magic circlet after careful and tender measurement of the proper finger, and twice he had sold it at an appalling reduction. One very small cockney—brother of one of the neglected ladies—had followed Bill with a riding-whip for days,

with the avowed intention of chastising him as his perfidy deserved, but on encountering the culprit, who was big and a notable athlete, had foregone his revenge, rather than have his sister's honoured name dragged into a police-case. The proclamation of this magnanimous conclusion so affected the false lover, that having first laughed until he cried, he went home with the youth, and made a new proffer of his hand and heart to the sister. But the lady (having made matters up with a chemist's assistant in the neighbourhood—an old flame of hers who was about to set up in business for himself, and had been loyal through many reverses) rejected him with scorn, and he went away to enjoy a momentary heartbreak.

He himself believed that with each new attack the symptoms increased in virulence, and he was so far gone on this last occasion that his most intimate and trusted friends began to take and offer (with due caution) odds of ten to one, twenty to one, and the like, on the chances of his final settlement.

Mr. Cassidy was an artist of great promise, though not as yet of any very great performance. At times, when his dress clothes were in his possession, he went into society, and shone resplendent in the midst of circles of gay faces

—for he carried good humour with him wherever he went, and people caught it as if it had been an epidemic—and made butterfly love to heiresses with unabashable, beautiful Irish impudence. At other times, when, from circumstances over which he had exercised no control, he was for the time deprived of society's conventional evening garb, he stopped out of society, and spent his evenings at the Cannibal Club, where the head waiter was always willing to give credit.

The Cannibals were artists, actors and journalists, and taking them altogether they were a charming set of people. The elders were singularly kindly, and lovable, and mellow-hearted, for it was a rule with the shallower sort of man to leave the Cannibals when he succeeded in life, and to put up for the *Roscius* or the *Eclectic*, and so only the better sort of oldsters, who had some spring green left under the winter white, stayed behind. Mr. Cassidy was on familiar terms with all of them, more or less—the sad-faced, sad-voiced, mild-mannered man who had written a hundred screaming farces—the genial and amiable author of “*The Lust of Blood*,” the lightest-hearted old man in London (and the crawliest work yet printed)—*et hoc genus omne*.

But on a certain summer Monday evening none of these likeable people were within the Cannibal precincts. The waiter lounged by the buffet at one end of the room and yawned portentously, his only amusement or distraction the killing of occasional flies with the professional napkin, and Mr. Cassidy, in a terribly despondent state of mind, sat at the centre table and turned over the pages of an illustrated journal with unusually bilious opinion about the artists engaged upon it, nearly all of whom were his personal friends.

The fact was that Mr. Cassidy had that afternoon (after suffering the pangs of love for the unheard-of period of three months) screwed his courage to the sticking point and proposed. The lady (whose father was also a Cannibal) had accepted him, and it seemed probable that Mr. Cassidy was fairly caught. The pitcher goes often to the well, but at last it comes home broken. It was not this reflection which filled the accepted lover's heart with gloom. In the ardour of the chase he had pleaded to be married in three months' time, and his plea had been granted. At that moment he carried all his worldly wealth in his waistcoat pocket, and it amounted to one and sixpence. In these circumstances even an Irishman might well feel sober for an hour.

Almost everybody was out of town at this season—the theatres, most of which were open to Mr. Cassidy at most times, were insufferably hot and stuffy—and Mr. Cassidy had nowhere to go, nothing to do, and nobody to talk to. At that moment he would have welcomed the advent of his bitterest enemy, if he had had one, and at the rattle of the door he looked up with interest.

“Aha! Mont, me boy, ye’re looking jolly. How are ye?”

“Dear boy,” said Mr. Montgomery Bassett, shaking hands with ponderous cordiality. “And how is town? Stands Scotland where it did?”

“Scotland Yard’s where it used to be,” returned Mr. Cassidy, brightening visibly. “Ye’ll have been in the country among the daisies and the milkmaids, eh, me boy?”

“A fortnight’s run at Oakenham,” responded Mr. Bassett. “The usual thing. Coriolanus, Macbeth, Hamlet; Hamlet, Macbeth, Coriolanus. House crammed every night, and brimming over. Hot? The very memory of it burns my throat. George. Whiskey and soda. Scotch. What do you take, dear boy?”

“Mont, me boy,” said Mr. Cassidy, when each was provided with a tall tumbler, and they sat facing each other, “I’ve news for ye.” He was so full of his own secret that he would

probably have sprung it on the waiter had he been left lonely for another ten minutes, and was almost ready to stop strangers with it in the street. "I'm going to be married. What do ye think of that?"

"You always were, dear boy," said Mr. Bassett.

"Now don't," said the artist, with a grimace, half-peevisish and half-droll. "I'm a gone man this time. It's as fixed as the transit of Venus, and as safe to happen."

"And who," asked the tragedian, "is the happy woman?"

"It's that that fixes it," replied Mr. Cassidy. "She's a Cannibal's daughter."

"Quite a family arrangement," said Mr. Bassett.

"Quite. It's Matilda, the only and accomplished daughter of Horace Leverett, Esquire, scenic artist, of Maida Vale."

"Stick to it, dear boy," cried the tragedian. "All happiness attend ye. I have my little budget of news also."

"Ye don't mean to say you're going to get married?" cried the artist.

"Not I," returned Mr. Bassett, "but my gyurl. William, dear boy, *you* threw sheep's eyes in that direction once. She might have done worse than take you, but in a worldly sense—in a worldly sense, dear boy—she has

improved upon anything at the Cannibals. I received last night—only last night—an offer for her hand from the most manly and charming young member of our landed gentry with whom it has been my good hap to be acquainted. It is not a secret, for the thing will be in *The Scourge* next week. The happy man—I think I may call him so without vanity, dear boy—the happy man is Mr. George Weatherley, of the Grange, Oakenham.”

“Whew! That’s a catch,” said Mr. Cassidy. “I know him. He’s worth fifteen thousand a year.”

“Five-and-twenty,” said Mr. Montgomery Bassett tranquilly. Not that he knew anything about it, but it was pleasanter so.

“And what does the young lady say?”

“She confessed her attachment,” said Mr. Bassett artlessly. “The young fellow has been following us about for a year. He tried to make it appear that he followed me for the sake of my acting. Of course, dear boy, I saw through that from the first.”

“Of course ye did,” replied the artist, perhaps with a readier assent than the actor had meant to ask for.

“The presentation of Hamlet strikes a responsive chord at times,” said Mr. Bassett, “but that chord rarely vibrates for a year

together. I began to observe. I watched the gradual growth of affection on both sides. Last night I was upon the point of demanding his intentions when he anticipated me by a proposal. I carried the news to Mary, who accepted it with that modest joy which characterises a cultured English gyurl under such circumstances. It is a relief to me, dear boy, for now that I have no one to toil for I shall bid the boards farewell."

"They're fine news, Bassett," said the friendly Irishman. "The lad's a nice lad, and the girl's a good girl. I drink their health, and long life to them."

"Thanks, dear boy," responded Mr. Bassett, who was visibly affected. He blew his nose to reveal his feelings, and put away his emotion and his handkerchief together. "By the way," he asked, "can you tell me the address of that fellow, Cameron?" He spoke with some severity of tone, and Cassidy asked in turn—

"What Cameron? Jack Cameron?"

"That's the man's name. I want to find him."

"His address is the same as mine," answered Cassidy. "We live in the same house, use the same sitting-room, and paint in the same studio. Jack and myself are like the swans of Juno, or the Soyamese twins."

"Thanks, dear boy," said Mr. Bassett, who, for some reason, looked less at ease than he had done a moment before. The clock striking a half-hour at this moment, he made a solemn reference to his watch, and arose from his seat. "I go—the bell invites me. Farewell, dear boy. Farewell."

"What's your hurry?" demanded Cassidy. "Stop and take another."

"Impossible, dear boy, impossible," said Mr. Bassett regretfully. "Affairs of state. Is Cameron in town?"

"He's been away a fortnight, but we never write letters to each other unless we want to borrow money, and that's mostly a poor chance," said Cassidy. "But talk of the devil—Jack, me child, we were that instant takin' awee your character."

Enter the identical handsome young man who the night before, in a country lane a hundred miles from London, had ruffled a pretty girl's hair and the heart of a father and rival. Now this handsome young man was evidently in the gayest spirits. His face shone with smiles, and his eyes sparkled. The very carriage of his head betokened jollity and freedom from all care.

"How do you do, dear boy?" asked Mr. Bassett, shaking hands with a look of em-

barrassed hurry. "I've something of consequence to say to you. Shall you be at home to-morrow at noon?"

"I've something of consequence to say to *you*," said the young fellow, with a light-hearted laugh. "Shan't I come to your place?"

"No," said the tragedian hurriedly. "I call on you at twelve to-morrow. Ta-ta, dear boys, ta-ta."

Mr. Montgomery Bassett dashed into the street and roared "Cab" in a voice of mellow thunder, to indicate the pressure upon his time. Cassidy and Cameron sat down together.

"What have ye been doing?" asked Cassidy.

"Working," said the other, with a sly, happy look at his friend's face.

"Where?"

"Down at Oakenham."

"All the time there?"

"All the time there."

"Then ye'd meet old Bassett. He's been playing there, he tells me."

"No, I didn't bother myself about old Bassett."

"Then ye don't know the news about his daughter down there."

"Gad!" said Jack. "Has he found it out?"

"Found it out?" replied Cassidy. "It doesn't seem to be much of a secret. It's a grand match for her." Jack Cameron's eyes fairly danced at this.

"He didn't tell you who it was, did he?"

"Faith, then, he did," said Cassidy drily. "But I've news nearer home. I'm going to leave ye, chum of my childhood. I'm going to be married meself."

"Not you," said Cameron. "Come, come, Bill, old man, my case is serious, and I expect to be congratulated. As for you, I'll congratulate you when you're married, but not before."

"*You're* going to be married, are ye? It's as catching as measles, and everybody seems down together."

"You absurd old idiot," said Jack, shaking him by the shoulders laughingly. "Didn't you say Bassett had told you?"

"About his girl? Of course I did."

"And told you whom she was going to marry?"

"So he did."

"Well?" said Cameron.

"Well," responded Cassidy.

"Well, whom did he say?"

"Young Weatherley, at the Grange at Oakenham."

"What?" cried Jack. "The liar!" But he had turned pale for all that.

"Jack, I'm afraid this'll be bad for ye."

"Pooh!" said Jack. "The girl's as true as steel, Bill, and she promised me last night."

"Bassett," answered Cassidy, "said 'twas last night that she promised young Weatherley. He says 'tis all arranged, and will be in the peepers next week. Jack, Jack, me boy, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. They're all alike. He's worth twenty-five thousand a year, Bassett says." His gay, good-natured, handsome Irish face was troubled. "Be a man and forget her, Jack."

"You don't know her, Bill," said the other, striving to speak naturally and lightly. "The little girl's as true as steel, and everybody knows Bassett. He's the greatest liar unhung."

"Then he'll be none too creditable as a father-in-law," said Cassidy. "Let her go." He began to relate the tragedian's story at full, but Jack stopped him.

"You believe Bassett?"

"Be George, I do, then," answered Cassidy. "And since she's like that, you're well escaped."

"Well," said the lover, looking straight into his friend's eyes, "I don't believe Bassett, and I'll believe nobody but the girl herself. I shall know in half-an-hour."

"You're going there?"

"I am."

"Then I'm with ye. I'll wait outside till ye know." The two set out together and walked in silence for awhile. "What'll ye do if it's true, Jack?"

"It isn't true!" Cassidy looked at him, and saw in the gaslight that his face was as white as a sheet.

"Jack, it might be. It may be. It's a great temptation. Why would he lie for nothing? What'll you do if it's true?"

"Do?" cried Jack. "Whistle her down the wind! But—true? It's as big a lie as the world holds anywhere. I *know* it. The little girl's as true as steel."

The emotional Irishman felt the tears sting his eyes.

"'Twill be a heavy trial," he said to himself. "The lad's heart's fresh, and tender, and gentle, and he'll feel it bitterly."

They said no more just then on either side. From the Strand to Bloomsbury Square is not a great distance, and the two young men walked fast.

"I'll walk up and down this side of the square till ye come back again," said Cassidy. Jack crossed the square and rang the bell at the door of the house in which Mr. Montgomery Bassett had apartments.

"Is Miss Bassett within?"

"Yes, sir," said the maid.

"No" said Mr. Bassett, appearing from a side room, and taking a hat from the stand in the hall. "I expected you, Mr. Cameron," he added. "I had reason to believe that the news I gave Mr. Cassidy this evening would bring you here, if he repeated it."

His voice shook a little, and his face indicated anything but self-possession. When, on the stage he told Tullus Aufidius (in what the critics thought his finest passage) that like an eagle in a dovecote he had fluttered the Volscies of Corioli, he was wont to look exceedingly brave and noble, and ready to face armies. But it is not only in real life that a man may play brave parts without much inward heroism. Whilst he spoke he put on his hat and moved towards the door, laying a tremulous hand on Jack's sleeve. The young fellow mechanically obeyed the impulse thus given, and retired a step. He was not within the house, and the tragedian, stepping out, closed the door with a bang. Cameron turned and faced him in the street.

"I have the very best of all reasons for disbelieving the story you told to Cassidy to-night," he said. The two men stood not

far from a street lamp, and sideways to it, so that each could see the other's face with some clearness. Neither liked what he saw. The great tragedian looked shifty and ill at ease—much like a detected liar, the young man thought, and yet he feared worse for himself and his sweetheart than that would prove. And a quarrel with the man—which hardly seemed avoidable—would help him little in any case. The young artist, on the other hand, looked to Mr. Bassett's eyes unpleasantly tall, strong, well-knit, and resolute. There was not in Jack's mind the faintest thought of violence, but his anger and his loyalty so braced him that he unconsciously carried his walking cane like a sabre at the slope, and Mr. Bassett thought the attitude threatening.

"Dear boy," he began in propitiatory tones, "I was an unwilling witness to your interview with my daughter last night in the lane at Oakenham." Jack lowered his stick with such a gesture that Mr. Bassett retired a step.

"Well?" said the artist.

"I know, therefore, on what admirable grounds you base your claim. I have no doubt that, but for the offer subsequently made, my daughter would have married you if you had continued to desire it."

"And after seeing what you saw, you thought it honourable to ask Mr. Weatherley's intentions."

"Dear boy!" said Mr. Bassett in deep-toned disclaimer.

"You told Cassidy that," Jack said sternly.

"A father," said Mr. Bassett, unwillingly accepting the position, "has a right to do his best for the interests of his child."

"You think you do your best for your daughter by going about to trap her into cupidity—by asking her to deny an honest love and to marry a man whom she dislikes, for money?"

"Pardon me, dear boy," said Mr. Bassett. "I am responsible to myself. You feel ill-used. That is natural. I am sorry for you, but you will soon get over it. I have acted in my child's best interest, and I am glad that she sees things in a sensible light. You must allow that she is a free agent. And I must beg you to understand, dear boy," he continued, growing bolder, for Jack was standing with bent head by this time, and no longer troubled the actor with his eyes, "I must beg you to understand that everything is over between Mary and yourself, and that I will not have her molested in her choice."

"Bassett," said the young fellow, looking up again white and stern, "I don't believe you. Your daughter has no blot of your own nature in her. Take me in to see her. Let me hear the news from her own lips; for until I do, I shall know that you are a liar. I can see it in your face. Take me in, and let me hear it from her."

"No" said the tragedian, "I can't do that, dear boy. I can overlook your insult to me; you are not master of yourself, and you will regret it hereafter. I am acting for the best interests of my child. I have no doubt that she sacrifices a romantic dream, but she sees things in their common-sense aspect—their business aspect, dear boy—and—"

"I'll not believe it," cried the lover, so that his voice rang clear across the square. How should he believe it, with her kisses so fresh upon his lips? And yet, many dreams have fallen into pieces so, and—the brittle picture broken—the world has looked cold and bleak beyond the shards, for many and many a hapless lad and lass. And he knew that well enough

The cry which his pain and rage had wrung from him brought Cassidy at a swift walking pace from the other side of the square.

"You stick to your story, Bassett" he said, breaking in upon them with no ceremony. "Jack's me dearest friend, and I've a right here, in a way, since 'twas to me ye told the news."

"I am very sorry, dear boy," said the actor, who welcomed Cassidy's arrival with all his heart. "The gyurl has chosen sensibly, and of course Cameron's hurt. But it is impossible that I should accede to his request, and allow him to pain my daughter (and himself) by a useless interview. She has thrown him over to marry a richer man, and she has done it of her own free will, and, on the whole, with my approval, and of course it was extremely painful and unwelcome to be used in that way."

"Jack," said Cassidy, "if 'tis true, and that seems likely, ye'd not care to see her and to hear her humiliate herself by speaking it. It's hard enough upon ye already. Let Bassett ask her to write."

"I accede to that," said Mr. Bassett, with so much eagerness and confidence, that Jack's heart for a moment died within him.

"I never had a line from her," he said miserably. "Let her tell me of something which only she and I know of, or I wont believe the letter comes from her."

"You can have her own statement by first post to-morrow," said the father. "I can forgive the poor boy's natural suspicions," he added in a mellow murmur to Cassidy.

"Very well," said the poor lad with feeble bitterness. "Come along, Cassidy." He moved a step or two and turned erect. "Bassett," he said in a steady voice, "if you play me false I'll kill you." A minute later, when he and Cassidy were twenty yards away, he began to sing: "*Souvent femme varie—Bien sot est qui s'y fie!*" Then he broke down altogether. "Never," he said with a bitter sob, "never believe in honour or honesty any more, Bill. I believe it. My God, I believe it! And my heart's—like—lead."

## CHAPTER III.

MR. MONTGOMERY BASSETT, admitting himself by a latch-key, hung his hat upon the stand, and entering the darkened side room from which he had emerged at the sound of Jack Cameron's voice, struck a match, lit the gas, and pulled down the window-blind. Next he took a decanter of whiskey from a cupboard, and, having twice filled and drained a wine-glass, drew a cigar-case from his breast pocket and began to smoke. He was not at ease, and the pallor of his face had taken an unwholesome tinge.

"The lad hit you hard, Mont," he said to himself in a deep murmur. "A sensitive nature like your own is unfit for that sort of work. It would have been easier to leave him to his dreams, but the duties of a father are not to be slighted for the sake of any little friendly sentiment. Now, Mont, go and see your little gyurl."

He was so nervous and so ill at ease, that he filled and drained the wine-glass again

before he obeyed his self-imposed command. When he had put away the decanter and locked the cupboard, he began to sing in his ponderous tones a snatch of a stage song:—

“Then let me the cannikin clink, boys, clink,  
Then let me the cannikin clink;  
For life’s but a span, and a soldier’s a man,  
So then let a soldier drink, boys, drink,  
So then let a soldier drink.”

It may or may not have struck him, as he went upstairs, that a song of Iago’s was too appropriate to the circumstances. He stopped short in his chant just as he had begun it for a second time, and mounted in silence. At the door of a back room on the second floor he paused for a few seconds, and then knocked.

“Come in,” said a girl’s voice.

“*May* I come in?” asked the tragedian with massive playfulness, as he opened the door a little. His face was ghastly.

“Not unless you are good and handsome,” said the voice, with a laugh.

“I am hideous and a monument of vice,” replied the tragedian.

“Oh, pray come in, in that case,” said the voice merrily. A light step crossed the room, and the fingers of a small white hand were laid on the edge of the door. Mr.

Bassett held the handle and there was a little playful struggle, in the course of which the father composed his features, until feeling himself presentable he allowed the door to yield, and entering suddenly, embraced his daughter in both arms and kissed her on both cheeks.

Mary Bassett was a pretty girl, as has been said already, and unless her eyes were more deceptive than even the eyes of young women are apt to be, she was as good as she was pretty. She looked good, emphatically. Her nose was piquant, and saucy, and sensible, whilst her lips were very mobile and full of feeling. Her chin was resolute without being unfeminine. Her eyes—deceptive or undeceptive—looked like absolute honesty. They were of so dark a grey that by gaslight they looked almost black, unless you were closer to them than a young man under ordinary circumstances would have a right to be. Then—according to Jack Cameron—they were of an infinite soft depth, and lighter in tone than they looked when seen from a distance. It had been noticed—by the same authority—that though she was not tall, being five feet four or thereabouts, she had a way in moments of dignified anger of looking six feet at least. If it is added that her com-

plexion was of a singular delicacy of bloom and purity of pallor, the description will be complete enough to leave the reader in the dark as to her aspect—which is about as much as can be expected of any description of a pretty woman.

One thing was clear. If she had the wreckage of any young man's peace upon her conscience, she bore it with wonderful equanimity.

"My darling," said her father, sitting down with his back to the light, and pulling for a moment rather fiercely at his cigar, "I have been to the club this evening—to look for letters. I saw somebody there, and learned a trifle in the way of news."

"Indeed?" said the girl, standing at the table and playing with a bit of lace there. She blushed a little as he spoke.

"And as a consequence," he went on, "I want you to write a letter.

"Yes?" she said, looking up with a puzzled face, as if she thought her first fancy a mistaken one. "To whom?"

"To Mr. John Cameron," said the tragedian. If his voice shook somewhat, the girl did not notice it.

"Why?" she asked, with a blush more vivid than before.

"Asking him," said Mr. Bassett, with occasional pauses between the words, each pause occupied by a pull at the cigar, "to call upon you and me in his approaching visit to Southampton for the arrangement of matters of which, as I am informed, you and he alike are cognisant. I believe him to be a thoroughly good young man, my dear, and I am rejoiced at his choice and proud of yours."

His voice shook noticeably now, and the girl observed it. What was likelier than that a father's heart should be moved a little at the beginning of a parting from his only child? She stole gently to him, and put an arm about his neck, and nestled to him with a kiss.

"Have you seen Jack to-night, papa?" she asked tremulously.

"Is it Jack already?" asked Mr. Bassett with shaky gaiety.

She answered with a half-tearful laugh,—  
"It has been Jack for a month past"

"I have seen him to-night," said the tragedian, more shakily and huskily than ever. "He has made a formal proposition for your hand and I have accepted it, contingently on your own acceptance, of course. We shall be in Southampton to-morrow at the old address,

and he follows—to paint a portrait there—on Wednesday. I promised that you should write and ask him to call upon us there, and that you should write to-night. Write now, my darling, and I will take the letter to the post before I go to bed, so that he will have no anxiety.” His voice almost failed him half-a-dozen times.

“Papa,” said the girl, with tender tears, “you are grieved to lose me?”

“My darling,” he answered, with a tremor that shook him from head to foot, “I have looked forward to it, and I shall be resigned.”

“Papa,” she said, “papa, I never dreamt that you would feel it like this. But we have never lived apart for a day, have we, dear? And it must not lead to a separation now. I said so, darling, only yesterday,” she went on, hiding her burning, tear-stained face upon his shoulder. “I told him that I could not bear to live apart from you, and that when we were married, you must have rooms in our house to live in whenever you came to town. And Jack agreed to that, quite gladly and readily, papa. He did, indeed.”

“Very well, darling,” he said, caressing her with a hand that trembled like a leaf. “Very well. Write your letter, dear, and let me take it to the post. Why, what is this

glittering on your finger? An engagement ring?" He had been looking for some such sign, whilst they had talked together.

"He gave it to me yesterday at Oakenham," she answered, with a mingled shyness and frankness which became her prettily. Her father made a motion to draw it from her finger, but she resisted gently.

"What?" he asked, with a quavering pretence at gaiety. "Mustn't even papa's fingers be entrusted with it?"

"No," she answered, blushing and smiling. "He made me promise that it should stay there until"—

"Until you were married?" He finished the sentence over which she faltered.

"Yes," she said shyly, nestling her face against his breast again.

"Let me look," he said, holding it to the light and bending over it. "An opal with four seed-pearls. A pretty ring, my dear. Wear it until you substitute a plainer one. Now write your letter."

She kissed him brightly and moved away. He sat, still with his face in the shadow, pulling at his cigar whilst her pen scratched over the paper rapidly. In a minute or two she brought the letter addressed and stamped, and laid it in his hands.

"Is it a pleasant task, dear?" she asked.

"Pleasant and painful," he responded. "I shall not see you again to-night, dear. Not that I shall be out late, but my thoughts are busy. Good-night."

In perjured treachery and all base intent, Mr. Montgomery Bassett's good-night kiss came near to the salute of Judas, and he felt it so. But as there never was a criminal whose crime showed itself to his own eyes in its own true form and hue, so he, with only occasional pangs of conscience and occasional meaner pangs of dread, brought himself to say that he was acting for the girl's ultimate good. These little youthful sentiments were never of a very permanent character, he told himself, and never altogether free, even whilst they endured, from much sentimental dross. He thought, honestly enough, to be just with him, that Love was a pinchbeck sort of jewel at the best, and would have reversed Solomon's proverb had he known it, preferring the stalled ox and hatred therewith to a dinner of herbs in loving company.

As he emerged upon the street he tore open the envelope and drew forth the sheet of paper within it, and disposed them in his breast pocket. He walked hastily until he came to the Tottenham Court Road, and en-

tering a tavern there, he called for a glass of whisky, and standing over it, read the letter through. It was so gay, and tender, and affectionate, that it knocked loudly at his heart more than once, short as it was, and more than once he was half inclined to abandon his device. One passage he noted in particular, a passage in which his daughter told of his attempt to remove her ring and of her resistance. She had not forgotten, so she wrote, the kisses her lover had given the ring before he gave it her. One for love, and one for constancy, and one for happy fortune. And gaily and tenderly, as girls use when in love, she said that he should have those three kisses given to his gift every night without a pause or break—one for love, and one for constancy, and one for happy fortune.

The tragedian put up the letter, and instructing the waiter to follow with a sheet of paper, an envelope, and pen and ink, he walked into a room reserved for the regular evening *habitués* of the place. There he wrote this:—

“MY DEAR CAMERON,

“I regret to say that my daughter was aware of your attempt to see her this evening, and is so disturbed that she is not in a condition to send you the letter I promised

you should receive. She undertakes, however, to send it in the morning.

“I am, my dear Cameron,

“Yours truly,

“MONTGOMERY BASSETT.”

He addressed the envelope, and leaving the house, dropped the letter into a pillar-post hard by, and walked slowly homewards. Arrived, he locked himself in his own room, and there burned his daughter's letter in the empty grate, stirring it carefully and relighting the charred fragments of it once or twice until nothing was left of it but grey ashes. He solaced himself with more whisky, and when he went to bed slept heavily, to awake in the morning with a headache, and with no sense of rest. At an unusually early hour he went out, having first written a second letter which ran thus:—

“My daughter is still strongly averse to the writing of the promised letter, but I have asked her for a token, and she promises to enclose in this, some toy—a ring, as I presume—received from you on Sunday last at Oakenham. She instructs me that if I say that associated with the gift there were three wishes—one for love, one for constancy, and one for happy fortune—you will recognise the words as your own, and will know that this comes from her. I

do not think it necessary to add anything to this communication,—which must be as painful for you to receive as for me to write,—but I rely upon you to act as becomes a gentleman, and not to persecute my daughter with appeals which must be fruitless.”

Bearing this elaborate villany with him, he made a tour of two or three jewellers' shops until he found a ring which looked so like the miserable lover's gift to Mary, that he could perceive no difference between them. This he bought and placed in the envelope, and having registered and posted the letter, walked home again to make preparations for his journey. All through the morning his daughter's gay, innocent talk, and the sound of her voice as she sang about the house, stung him almost unbearably. He feigned sleep in the railway carriage as they travelled together to Southampton, and Mary occupied herself with a book of poems, and her own fancies. Once or twice she drew off her glove to look at her lover's gift, and believing herself unobserved, kissed it thrice—once for love, and once for constancy, and once for happy fortune. Her father, with his travelling cap drawn over his eyes, saw her through half-closed lids, and in his wicked heart began those unavailing remorse

which are the companions of deliberate crime. He suffered horribly already, and he saw plainly enough that he would suffer more in the future. He knew that his scheme would bring him no comfort even if he carried it to triumphant fulfilment, but however miserable it might be to go on, he found a backward step impossible. Whatever new villanies might be needed for the purpose, Jack Cameron and his daughter must be kept apart.

He played Macbeth that evening, and the newspaper critics next morning told their readers that he had never played so finely. It was a tradition in that school of tragedy to which Mr. Montgomery Bassett belonged, that at certain portions of the play the actor himself should be so wrought upon that it should be dangerous to interrupt the flow of his emotions, even behind the scenes, where the spirit of the part was to be kept up by much solemn striding to and fro, and many savage execratory murmurs. The eminent tragedian had always supported this tradition, and now, with a genuine mental passion added to an assumed mental passion which had grown almost real through years of habit, he was dreadful to the supernumeraries, and the carpenters read terrors in his eye.

Mr. Bassett's last five nights at that house were long remembered, and became a tradition of the local stage. When on the Thursday night he played Othello, the rising young artist who was cast for Iago suffered terribly at his hands. The great tragedian's deep voice throbbed with anguish and rage as he took that Iago by the throat and shook him at the line—

“If thou dost slander her and torture me.”

He haled the young man about the stage, and dashed him hither and thither with prodigious strength and violence, and the stage manager at the flies almost whispered as he addressed the leading lady with the statement that Bassett was in force to-night. There is probably not much more humbug behind the scenes than there is elsewhere. But there is a little humbug there, and everybody agreed to believe that Mr. Montgomery Bassett was not acting when he left the boards, but that he was absolutely inflated with the passion of the part, and could not help striding stagily, and scowling and muttering, and folding and unfolding his arms, as he awaited his cue in the slips, or his call in the cramped limits of his dressing-room. So that the great tragedian began to make capital of his remorse, and to draw satisfaction from his own misery of spirit.

Mary had expected a reply from Jack on Wednesday morning, and had watched the postman on his rounds. When his knock came down the street her heart would flutter until it had gone by, and had faded out of hearing on the other side, and then for a while she would be listless. Wednesday passed and Thursday came, but no letter, and she began to be nervous about Jack's health, and to have fancies about railway accidents and street disasters. Thursday night found her at the theatre, where she watched the play with little interest, and her mind was with her lover all the evening.

The door-keeper knew her, and she ran round to her father's room in the pause before the last act. She found him in his paint and his stage jewels, pacing up and down and muttering, and there was a scent of Scotch whiskey in the air.

"Wait here," he said abruptly, when he saw her, and left the room at once to wander in semi-darkness about the back of the stage, or to stand still with folded arms staring gloomily at the workpeople until they shook under his gaze; and the leading lady, hearing of his mood, chose to think him dangerous, and flatly refused to play the part out unless he gave a promise through the

stage manager to murder her more gently than he had shaken Iago.

"Mr. Bassett," said the stage manager, "Miss Montmorency is afraid of you. You are in such magnificent form to-night, sir, that the poor thing is actually trembling at the thought of the bolster."

"Tell her," said the great man in his magnificent hollow tones, "that she needs not fear me. I will deal gently with her." And he took to striding to and fro again, with his chronic humbug and his flogged artistic rage, and his real fears and miseries all mounting so high in a mingled tide within him that he felt absolutely proud of himself, as if he were really a dark and noble criminal of fiction, like the Corsair of Lord Byron.

Mary was not unused to this sort of display, and was not surprised at it. She knew her father's reputation, and had a great pride in it, and she was accustomed to hear him talking with his friends of that artistic passion which at times controlled him. Sitting there, she noticed that the house was unusually silent. It had been until now remarkably demonstrative, and its present quiet argued triumph. When at last the applause broke out at the fall of the curtain it sounded through the whole building like a hurricane. Mary slipped out of the

room and saw her father answer three times to the resounding plaudits of the audience. This pleased her so that for the moment she forgot her little nervous anxieties, and thrilled and glowed with pride in him.

"Since Macready played here last," said the stage manager, "I assure you, Miss Bassett, there has been no such performance witnessed here."

The company applauded behind the scenes when the great man came back after his final bow, and he saluted them in solemn silence. He signed to his daughter to await him, and the stage manager politely entertained her in the green-room until Othello appeared, pale and languid, in his glossy broadcloth and spotless linen, to escort her home.

"You had a great triumph to-night, papa," she said, taking his arm as they came upon the street.

"I do not care to speak of it," said Mr. Bassett. "I have other things to think of." The girl was discomfited, without knowing why.

The little fears and anxieties about Jack began to come back again, and to assume larger proportions. Her elastic step grew dull on a sudden, and she walked in silence. Their lodgings were not far from the theatre, and were soon reached.

"Mary," said her father, facing her in the sitting room, "I have heard very unpleasant news this evening. Has Mr. Cameron replied to your letter?"

"No," she answered, with a pale face and eyes widened.

"If," said the tragedian, dashing his hat upon the ground—"if he has trifled with you—but no. It is beyond belief."

"Papa!" she said, quietly enough. "What is it? There is nothing to be alarmed at in this brief delay. Something has prevented him from writing. I shall hear to-morrow."

"I am not eager to suspect him," said the actor, walking up and down the room with a disordered step. "But if he *has* played you false, it were better for him that his mother had not borne him."

"You know something?" she began. "No. You know nothing against Jack. I am not at all alarmed about him. I shall hear to-morrow."

"It would be a false mercy to shield you from the truth, my child," said her father, pausing in his walk, and regarding her with a terror-stricken face. "I have tried to doubt it, but it is beyond doubt."

Mr. Montgomery Bassett was undoubtedly, unless all his critical contemporaries lied or were mistaken, a fine actor; but neither he

nor any actor that ever trod the boards could have acted the face and voice with which he spoke. He knew that well enough, and he trembled lest his child should read him. But his consternation and misery were so real that the girl never doubted the origin of his disturbance, and so the very cowardice with which he played his part helped him to its proper presentation.

"What is it?" she asked defiantly. "Tell me."

"What is it?" he cried, turning his miserable white face upon her. "He is a hound, a scoundrel. He has abused your faith. He is here in Southampton now—here in the town—visiting the woman to whom he will be married in a fortnight—if he lives so long!"

The girl's face was as white as his, but she answered quietly,—

"You have been deceived. I don't believe it, papa. I refuse to think about it. I won't dishonour him, and I won't dishonour myself, by thinking seriously of it for a second." Her own denial gave her confidence—the very sound of her own voice quieted and fortified her. "Poor dear papa," she said, standing on tip-toe to embrace him, and speaking with a half-gay pity now that she was so sure at heart again. "I can see how much you have been troubled by this silly tale."

“My poor child!” he answered, ghastlier than ever now. “My poor child!”

He sank into a chair and shed real tears. What with whisky and that stale, flogged passion of his business, and her tenderness, and his remorse and pretences, he was all unstrung, and as he wept he did half feel a rising rage against Jack Cameron, and a pity for his own child, as if the lie had all been gospel truth. A mere common liar could not have risen to this height of mendacity. Poets reach such a stage in the pursuance of their craft sometimes, and Mr. Bassett had spent his life in the simulation and the practice of the emotions.

His tears shook her faith, and she began to cling to him, half in pity, and half in terror lest the dreadful story should be true. He took her head to his breast, so that she might not see his face, and she felt the sobs that shook him. It broke upon her then that it was—it must be—beyond a doubt in his mind, or he would not be so moved. But then the loyalty of her own heart rose in rebellion at the shameful story. She recalled her lover’s kisses, she saw the laughing tender light in his honest eyes—surely his eyes were honest—she felt his strong, manly arm about her waist, her head lay again upon his shoulder. Girls remember these things when lovers prove false, and for some moments they can find

no belief in falsehood, and the past is back again, and the vows are true. No, no, no, her heart cried out to her—he cannot be false. And then with a sickening revulsion—It must be true, and no faith or hope of mine can cure it; and the poor thing, with her head lying over that Judas heart, began to cry passionately and terribly, whilst the hands that had opened her letter caressed her, and the lying voice tried to soothe her.

When at last she lifted her piteous face and looked at him, a pang went through him. But there was no going back, and he had his part to play.

“You wont think about him, my darling,” he said, with real tenderness and pity. His remorse began to burn him like a fire, and yet he had laid it upon himself to lie, and to break his child’s heart for greed, and there was no way out of it. “You wont fret about him.”

“If this is true,” she said, standing erect before him, and wringing her disordered hair backwards with both hands, “don’t have any fear for me, papa. I shall not break my heart for any male flirt of them all. Good-night, dear.” She kissed him vehemently with no doubt of him. “I have you left, papa,” she said, sobbing. “Good-night, dear.”

The tragedian sat alone an hour later, and the decanter was empty before he left it.

"She bears it pluckily," he murmured somewhat thickly. "And it is all for her good, and she will marry young Weatherley now to show the other fellow that she doesn't care for his desertion. He will make her a very good husband, and she will have everything that heart can wish for."

Mr. Bassett arose with a headache next day, but his daughter did not rise. He had no great appetite for breakfast, and he waited her coming for a long time. At last he sent the landlady to arouse her, and the woman, after a few minutes' absence, came down with frightened looks and ran into the sitting-room, with no preliminary knock.

"Miss Bassett is ill, sir," she said. "Come and look at her." The tragedian pushed past her and ran upstairs to his daughter's room.

Mary was sitting upright in bed, with her brown hair about her shoulders. Her eyes were amazingly bright and restless, her face was flushed, and she was talking nonsense volubly.

"What's the matter?" cried the terror-stricken father.

"I'm afraid, sir," said the landlady, "that she's in a raging fever."

## CHAPTER IV.

JACK CAMERON, arrived at his own rooms, sat down with a book before him, and made a dogged pretence of reading. His chum lit a pipe and regarded him with troubled, friendly eyes. Jack's book was of very small value to him, as you may fancy, except as a shield for his emotion; but he read on steadily, line after line and page after page, understanding nothing. He had already shown more than he cared to show, and was resolute to keep a guard upon himself for the future, but his heart was full of rage and wounded love and pride; and, these passions rushing through him every now and again like a very tempest, he had much ado to keep his limbs still.

To be in love means much to a clean-hearted youngster. You have jogged along with the crowd, content to be no better than your neighbours, satisfied with an every-day morality and commonplace ambitions after money and worldly ease, and all on a sudden some beautiful

new presence dawns upon your life, and beckons you to a level you had done no more than dream of. And this sweet presence, which bears actual airs of heaven with it, grows more and more lovely and beneficent, and beckons you higher and higher, and smiles kindlier and kindlier, until in some unguessed-of moment it turns with a face of hideous derision and mocks your folly that believed in it. This is to be jilted for money. Your soul rises in despair and self-disdain, and the goddess of your worship tells you that the love of woman is a cheat, and a heart of cankered brass a poor lad's only safeguard.

All this was true to Jack Cameron, because he believed it to be true.

He would not have been the honest lad he was if many doubts had not reached his heart. Loyalty finds it hard to believe in disloyalty. Cassidy watched his friend almost with terror, his quiet seemed so unnatural, and in a while his fears assumed a shape so threatening that he stole from the sitting-room and locked up his friend's razors.

"This kind of thing," he said to himself gloomily, "has ended that way before now."

After an hour or two spent in trying quiet, Jack rose and filled his pipe, and at this sign

Cassidy begun to bustle about the room and to set glasses and a bottle on the table.

"To their father with the lot of them," said Cassidy suddenly. "What do we want to go getting married for? We've got each other, that's been chums now for a dozen years and more, and we'll just try to be content at that, Jack, me boy, and let the baggages slide."

"Bill," said Cameron, breaking silence for the first time since his entrance, "make me one promise."

"Anything in nature," answered Cassidy.

"Never speak about this any more. Never hint at it."

"I wont then," said the Irishman tenderly. "Have a glass of whisky, Jack."

"No. I wont drink now. Good night."

"Good night."

The heart-broken lover went to his own room and walked gloomily up and down all night. His companion sat in the chamber beneath and listened to his footsteps.

"They're all alike," said Cassidy to himself. "When was *I* ever unhappy except when I was danglin' afther a petticoat? But I'll have to marry now if I spend the honeymoon in the workhouse, and that looks likely. Faith, I'd rather stop and be a companion to the poor boy there. I know what it is, Jack, me lad,

for I've been through it myself, as often may-be as most men, and I can feel for you."

The watcher in the lower room dozed, and woke to see the first grey gleam of dawn break through the crevices of the window shutters. The step was still going to and fro, to and fro overhead. Cassidy began to think his friend took the matter too much to heart, but the thought of going to bed and making himself comfortable whilst his companion suffered in solitude never occurred to him; a fact from which it may be argued that friendship was a sentiment more solid and enduring than love in his case. He threw open the shutters noiselessly and let the summer morning light into the room, and, filling his pipe, sat down to read with the monotonous footsteps still going to and fro, to and fro overhead.

Howland Street, as everybody knows, is at the same time in the middle of Prague and near the middle of London. It is not an early street, and only the roll of a passing cab or a mail-cart in the great thoroughfare near at hand broke on the silence until long after broad daylight had settled down upon it. But when Cassidy had dozed again and again over his book the first of the morning cries sounded on his ear, and after no great interval the postman's knock came down the silent

street. The watcher having thrown up the window quietly to observe the progress of the postman, marked the cessation of the footsteps overhead, and, listening, heard the creaking of the window as it rose in the room above him.

"The poor lad can't believe she's fooled him yet," said Cassidy sadly.

The postman's knock sounded at the front door, and Cameron ran rapidly and lightly down stairs. He came back with the false letter the tragedian had written the night before, and Cassidy intercepted him on the landing. He had read the note already, and he slipped it into the Irishman's hands without a word, and passed upstairs again. The footsteps were going to and fro once more as Cassidy read the wicked lines.

"She's disturbed is she, poor thing?" he said bitterly. "That's a pity." He threw the epistle on the table, and went wandering disconsolately about the room, but hearing the landlady astir, he fled like a guilty ghost to his own chamber. By-and-bye Cameron appeared before him half-dressed.

"Have you seen my razors, Cassidy?" he asked.

"I—I borrowed them," said Cassidy, blushing and stammering. Jack stood by whilst he unlocked the drawer in which he had hidden them.

"You old fool," he said with that friendly brutality young men use when they want to hide themselves.

"I was not so certain of that same," blundered Cassidy; but Cameron, returning no answer, marched off with his recovered property. He looked rather stern than miserable, Cassidy thought, and indeed the young man's heart had been oftener filled with rage than with any other passion during that dreadful night, and by this time it had hardened into an intense, bitter contempt for the girl he had loved so dearly. His first cry under the blow had been repeating itself in his mind all night: "Never believe in honour or honesty any more!" He told himself how salutary the lesson was, and the firstfruits of Mr. Montgomery Bassett's plot declared themselves in the growth of a trustful, affectionate youngster into a cynic. He met his chum at breakfast as usual, but without the usual greeting, and having forced himself to eat some little food, he went downstairs to the studio and began to work. Only yesterday he would have lightened labour by the singing and whistling of many cheery staves—he had a whistle like a thrush's note—and Cassidy, as he worked on his own side of the studio, missed the customary sounds of merriment.

"Hang it all!" said the perturbed Irishman, regarding his work with disfavour, "the shadows are painted in mud and the lights in chalk. How are you doing, Jack?"

"Well enough," said Jack shortly, and silence fell again.

"Art," said Cassidy, "is nothing apart from the oydayal. The last picture I painted—'twas finished last week, and Isaacs has it—had a fine original notion in it. Two girls sitting on a rustic bench with a poodle dog between them. Now this is a loftier conception even than that. Two girls sitting on an esplanade, with a poodle dog apiece. There's liberality for you!"

Jack would have obliged his chum with a laugh in the old times, and now the Irishman missed that friendly contribution to the gaiety of the day.

"Bad luck to me," he grumbled, "I don't know whether the girls are more like poodles or the poodles are more like girls. I can't paint to-day." Jack worked on in silence, and Cassidy fidgeted miserably for an hour or two. A knock came to the door at about the usual hour for luncheon, and the servant appeared with a letter pinched in the cleanest corner of her apron. Cassidy took it and passed it on to Cameron, recognising Bassett's handwriting.

"The letter's registered, sir," said the girl, "and the postman wants a receipt."

Jack walked out into the hall, letter in hand, and by-and-bye returned with it, still unopened. Cassidy, pretending to be busy, watched him furtively through a mirror which stood in one corner of the room. With bent brows the young fellow read through the letter, and then searching the envelope drew forth the ring, and after looking at it for a minute tossed it lightly away, and began to laugh in a manner so harsh and unnatural that Cassidy was frightened by it.

"One for love, and one for constancy," cried the hapless lover, "and one for happy fortune. Love, and constancy, and happy fortune." He stooped to pick up the ring and held it high at arm's length. "I gave her this," he said, still laughing in the same mad, unnatural way, "on Sunday night. Before I gave it I kissed it, once for love, and once for constancy, and once for happy fortune. And now read this." He cast the letter towards his friend, and it fluttered to his feet. Cassidy lifted it and read it through, and then the two faced each other.

"Jack," said his friend, "if ye thought about her twice after this, ye'd be less than a man."

"Thought about her!" cried the poor fellow with another wild laugh. "Love, and constancy, and happy fortune!" Then he lifted up both hands with a sudden gesture of despair and dropped them again, and began to rage to and fro along the room, cursing terribly. "Money! Let it cram her hollow heart and burn it! Load her with money, and let it sink her to the devil! Oh, the liar! Oh, the liar! Sunday night, Bill, only Sunday night. Less than two days ago, and she swore she loved me. She kissed it back again—SHE did—think of it—once for love, and once for constancy, and once for happy fortune." He began to laugh again more wildly than before, and this time the laughter ended in awful tears.

Cassidy stood helplessly over him, with an unfelt friendly hand patting at his shoulder.

"They're all alike, Jack," he said brokenly, "they're all alike. Don't take it this way, me poor boy, don't! You're breakin' *my* heart as well as your own, Jack. But maybe it's best for you to cry, after all. It'll be the sooner over, me poor Jack. It's as well that she's as bad as she is, for you'll be going the right way the sooner for it."

Cameron recovered his self-possession in a little while, and shaking hands with averted

head, left the studio without a word. The ring lay on the table, and Cassidy, taking it up, looked at it with moist eyes, and dropped it again.

"Such a pretty little girl," he said to himself miserably. "With such a downright honest, friendly look. And to be such a cold-blooded little traitress after all."

At that moment Mary Bassett was singing like a bird in her own room, and at every note of the love-song she sang, her heart went out to Jack with innocent, virginal affection. At the notes the tragedian writhed, and remorse already began to sear his soul.

## CHAPTER V.

THE landlady's surmise was true, and the nearest doctor being hastily summoned, confirmed it.

"There has probably been some great mental shock here," said the doctor.

"There has," said Montgomery Bassett, with a white face, in which every muscle was twitching. "She has been most basely and cruelly deceived by a young man to whom she was engaged to be married. Is she in any danger?"

"The case is grave," the doctor answered, "she will need skilful nursing, and I will, with your permission, send in a professional nurse at once."

"Do anything and everything that can be done," cried the tragedian. The medical man was accustomed enough to scenes of domestic anguish, but he thought he had not often beheld such signs of trouble as Mr. Bassett displayed. That gentleman was plunged indeed into a condition of the utmost

terror and dismay. He had counted on a tear or two, on a cheek a little pallid, a gait a little languid, a day or two of low spirits and poor appetite, but not on this, or anything near it or like it, and it staggered him. If she died he would be a murderer as truly and clearly as if he had struck her down with his own hand. His thoughts on matters theological had never been of much trouble to him, but like the great majority of people he had certain vague ideas of a future life in which he would have to pay for earthly offences, and there was or had been a tacit understanding with himself that before he laid down the burden of the flesh he would square himself for all that, and be prepared to die in a properly reformed and repentant spirit. He thought nothing in the world so wicked as an atheist, and had the highest possible opinion of the clergy. So that he, like other people, began to consider the great problem which vexed Hamlet's stepfather—how to be pardoned and retain the offence. To go back to Cameron and confess his villany was absolutely out of the question, and it was just as impossible to acknowledge it to his daughter, even if she should recover. But whilst she lay in danger—and she lay at death's door. for days—he did a little bit of

sustained mental gymnastics which was worthy of him. He determined that he would at least make no approach to young Weatherley, and no attempt to induce his child to marry that wealthy and eligible young man. Heaven, beholding this sign of repentance in him, would perhaps overlook his sins, and allow her to recover. Then (though it would have been fatal to his prospects to confess as much at present), when the danger was over, he could do what he liked.

There is no reason to linger over the sufferings the great tragedian had brought upon his daughter. They entailed much suffering upon himself, much discomfort, and some money losses—for he was compelled to sacrifice a fortnight's starring at Manchester and a week in Sheffield. Theatrical papers reported Miss Bassett's illness, with comments, pitying and laudatory, on Mr. Bassett. When Mary began to get a little strong again, he left her in the care of a maiden sister and the hired nurse, and went upon his tour again, travelling lonely for a month or so. Encouraging letters reached him often, and now and then a line from the girl herself, short and feebly written, but full of a trust and affection which wounded him whilst it soothed. For he knew what a scoundrel he had been,

and what a scoundrel he meant to be, and it was at once painful and pleasant to know that her trust in him was undisturbed. That pale magenta nose of his began to assume a deeper tint, for in these days he drank a good deal to keep his courage up, and to flood his conscience, and so to render it inaccessible to Reproach, who generally, it would seem, prefers to go dry-shod. But Mary gradually grew better, youth and a good constitution being on her side, and against her will she began to see that she must go on living. Living, since Jack was false, promised to be but a dull business, yet she bent herself to the task like a woman. She had her father to live for, and that was something. She saw growing signs of age in him, and although he had always been kind to her in speech and manner, he had never been so kind as now. Her care for his advancing years, and the tenderness to which, for a time at least, his accusing conscience stung him, formed a double bond.

Things went on in this way until at the approach of early winter Mr. Montgomery Bassett secured an engagement at the Lane. He was wont to play nothing but Shakespeare, and to declare that nothing but Shakespeare was worth playing, but the new

big spectacular and historical play was likely to run for some months, and Mary wanted rest.

Young Weatherley, though out of our sight all this time had not been idle. He had friends in plenty, as any young fellow with his income was likely to have, and some of them who wanted to be faithful and to keep their own share of the loaves and fishes, told him candidly what a silly thing it would be for him to marry an actor's daughter. But he went on growing in his own way more and more attached to the girl, and more and more determined to win her. He was bitterly incensed at Jack Cameron's desertion of her, even though it paved the way for his own advance, and he used to go about breathing threats and slaughter against that unhappy young artist, who knew nothing of his enmity.

Now that this settlement in London was decided upon, young Weatherley took advantage of it by hiring chambers in the Albany, where he lived in great splendour. Mr. Montgomery Bassett was there often, and the gilded youth and the tragedian were to be seen together on any fine day in the Strand, lounging in the humble portico of the Cannibals, or walking arm-in-arm, each behind a

Partagas of young Weatherley's providing. The young man was pretty often to be seen in Bloomsbury Square, and he became a familiar figure to Mary. It need scarcely be said that on his daughter's recovery Mr. Bassett's scruples of conscience had vanished. It need scarcely be said either that in a man of Mr. Bassett's temperament, the lies he had told about Jack Cameron soon began to look true by virtue of repetition, or that the actor began to hate the man he had so deceived and injured.

As in the great world, so in the lesser worlds of which the great is made. That which by the silliest of modern conventions calls itself SOCIETY, is quite a small affair when contrasted with Society at large, and in the theatrical and artistic professions there are eclectic sets which occupy relatively the same position. Mr. Montgomery Bassett, when he chose, could move in the innermost theatrical circle, and he began now to visit it in company with his daughter and young Weatherley. They were a good deal seen together, and it was generally taken for granted that Miss Bassett and Mr. Weatherley were "engaged."

Now that was a condition of things for which young Weatherley ardently sighed, and

the great tragedian laboured. He chanted Weatherley's praises all day long. A good lad—a frank, unaffected, honest nature—a young fellow of the most honourable impulses, not very clever, perhaps, but a good fellow, a *good* fellow.

“I wish, papa,” said the girl one afternoon, “that you would find some other topic. I am a little tired of Mr. Weatherley.” Grief and illness had not spoiled a naturally sweet temper, but they had left a sense of irritability behind them. Mr. Bassett was one of those men who imperatively demand to be brow-beaten, and he was sometimes a little afraid of his daughter. But in this case his interests pricked him forward.

“My dear,” he said tenderly, “I hope not.”

“And why do you hope not?” asked the girl, drawing her little figure to its full height.

“Because, my dear,” he answered, seeing clearly that just then he dare give no further reason, “I am more attached to Mr. Weatherley than to any other young man I know, and I should be sorry to see you on ill terms with your father's friend.”

“The young man is endurable enough,” she said, “but I am a little tired of hearing him spoken of.”

"Very well, my dear," said her father submissively. "We will talk of what you please."

The girl ran impulsively to him and kissed him, with a swift self-accusation in her heart. "Oh, papa," she cried, clinging to him, "I am not the girl I used to be. I am ill-tempered and disagreeable, and I like to make you unhappy. And you are always so good and kind, and you never say an angry word to me; and I know how wicked I am all the while, and yet I seem somehow as if I couldn't help it."

"My dear," said her father, stooping to kiss her, "you are the best daughter in the world." His conscience assailed him much less severely now than it had done, but it still pricked him a little, and helped to keep him tender in his manner to her. For after all, he loved her in a way, and he was not altogether an unnatural monster. He had stabbed her to the heart already, but that had been done out of anxiety for her welfare—it was singular how well he managed on the whole to keep his own considerations out of sight—and if she married a man for whom she did not care, why, scores of women did it every day, and looked anything but broken-hearted afterwards.

"I am a very naughty, wayward girl," she answered. "But I will try to be good to you papa. I will indeed."

"I could wish you no better than you are," he said, kissing her again. His pulse took a disorderly beat, and the palms of his hands grew moist. But could he find a more favourable time than this? "Have you ever guessed a reason for my speaking to you of Mr. Weatherley?"

"If there is a reason, say nothing about it, papa," she answered. There was nothing in her manner to make him afraid of his enterprise, and he ventured to press his question.

"Have you ever guessed a reason for it?"

"No," she said wearily, "I have not troubled to think about it. Oh, papa," she cried, laying her cheek against his breast, "I am getting to be downright false and disingenuous. Say nothing about the reason, dear. If my guess is not a very vain and silly one, I want to hear no more about it."

Still there was nothing to scare him from his purpose.

"He will wait as long as you like, my darling. And it is the one desire of your poor old father's heart."

"I am very sorry, dear," said the girl, drawing herself away from him and looking

down at her own languidly intertwining fingers. "I am very sorry."

"Think, my darling," he urged her, warming to the theme, "think of the burden of anxiety the contemplation of your future lays upon me. I have so little to leave you, and I cannot bear to think of you upon the stage. I know the coarseness of the life and its dangers, the scandals that attend it. A good heart is laid at your feet, my dear, an honest, honourable heart, and a great fortune. I will not urge you for my own sake, but it may have some weight with you if you think that I am getting old, that my time is short, that my faculties are naturally decaying. My popularity may go at any time, and I may live to hear it said—'superfluous lags the veteran on the stage.' If I seem to speak selfishly, I speak for your own sake after all. Your future is my sole anxiety."

In an affair absolute and simple Mr. Montgomery Bassett could have achieved to the lie absolute and simple with no great difficulty, as he had proved already. But here it was not easy to be altogether false, and he did care enough for his own child to wish her well, even apart from his own interests. Her welfare and his own being both wrapped up together in this matter, he was moved with a genuine emotion. The girl's tired heart took it all for gospel.

What had she to desire in the world, except to please her father? Whom else had she to think of? Yet a marriage without love looked like a blasphemy of that religion of the heart which she had learnt less out of books than her own nature. Thinking of it, there were tears in her eyes for very pity of herself if she should yield. Life would be cold and lonely enough in any case, but bearable without that.

"Don't be anxious about me, dear," she said, laying her cheek against his breast again. "And don't be anxious for yourself. You were never so popular, and you never played so well as you do now. Everybody says so. All the papers say so, dear. Let us live together, papa, and you shall live to be very, very old, a grey old gentleman," she went on with tremulous gaiety, "with just a little touch of gout—not enough to hurt much, but just enough to look nice, and aristocratic, and old-fashioned. And we will have a little cottage in some country place, papa, and live there together, and"—the voice grew more and more tremulous, and was suddenly broken by a rush of tears—"and die together." She ended with both arms about his neck, and he stood stroking her hair whilst he wondered if it were safe to go a little further.

He would try, at any rate, and he nerved himself.

"You think so now," he said, still stroking her hair softly and putting one caressing arm about her neck. "You think so now, but when you come to—to—to *think* a little," he was very nervous, "you will find that you have too much proper pride, my darling, to have it thought that you will always wear the willow for a scoundrel."

He had wished a thousand times to find courage enough to launch that shaft. It had left his hand now. The boomerang would have furnished a better simile. The argument was as likely as not to turn and knock his scheme on the head.

He felt her tremble a little in his embrace, and he knew that her tears had ceased. By-and-bye she pushed him away gently, and for a second hid her face in both hands. Then moving her hands sideways and backwards with a firm pressure on her forehead, and twining her fingers in her hair, she looked at him with a glance he remembered to have seen before when his wicked plot first bore fruit.

"Nobody," she answered, with a quiet voice, "shall say that of me."

She left him standing there without another word. Her father lit a cigar and sat down beside the fire.

"I was wise to try it," he said to himself.

"The case is anything but hopeless, but we must be content to go slowly."

Whilst he sat thinking the servant brought in two letters bearing a crest he knew. He did not need to open the one addressed to himself to know its contents, but he cut open the envelope, and after glancing at the card it held, stuck it between the pier-glass and its frame. Mr. Dexter requested the pleasure of Mr. Montgomery Bassett's company on Friday evening next. Mr. Dexter was at the very heart of artistic and theatrical society in London. Perhaps somebody knew why, or could have given a guess as to how he came there. It was enough for most people that he *was* there, and it was the correct thing to go to Dexter's, and everybody who was anybody in the stage world, or the critical world, or the painting or the musical worlds, might be met there at odd times. Young Weatherley, who worshipped all the lions who roared there and revered an actor as Goethe revered a sage, was the proudest man in London when Mr. Bassett had first taken him to Dexter's.

The actor, after looking at the card awhile, turned to the table and wrote a note to his dear Dexter, requesting that he would be good enough to send an invitation to Mr.

Weatherley, his dear friend, whom Dexter knew already. He promised his own presence and was Dexter's very truly. Then having brushed his speckless, glossy broadcloth and his shining hat, and having drawn on with great care his brand-new gloves, he left the house, and, posting his letter by the way, walked down to the Cannibals. In the Strand he ran full against Jack Cameron, who looked him in the face and cut him dead. That was natural enough, but Mr. Bassett felt that it displayed a certain littleness of nature, a want of magnanimity, which he said he was sorry to observe. For his part he hated Jack like poison, as was also natural, but he was prepared to conduct himself towards him after the fashion recognized by gentlemen. The wolf was not the first nor the last logician of hatred to make the stream run backward as an excuse for his own rage, and Montgomery Bassett was conscious of a deep-seated distrust of Cameron as a man of honour. Cameron was a thorough-paced scoundrel by this time. A real liar is the most amazing creature in the world. He lies and knows that he lies, and he believes himself. At this stage had the great tragedian arrived, but he was willing to show his own noble nature and to hide all outward sign of

his feelings towards the man who had injured him. Curious, isn't it?

Jack's name was off the Cannibals' books long since, and that fact was not without comfort for Bassett, who, in spite of his readiness to forgive, had no passionate longing to meet his enemy. But if the name of Cameron was gone the name of Weatherley replaced it, and in the book devoted to the proposition of new members Bassett's ponderous signature (which was written with a broad quill and took half-an-hour to dry) followed it, as that of nominator.

Mr. Weatherley, attired in great splendour, sat at one of the tables turning over the papers and magazines with a discontented air when Bassett entered. His face cleared as he arose to shake hands, but clouded again a little as he resumed his seat.

"I say, Bassett," he began, leaning his head close to that of the great tragedian, "don't you think I've dangled about long enough? You keep on talking about patience, but there are circumstances under which patience isn't easy; now, aren't there, Bassett?"

"Dear boy," said Bassett, in a rumbling murmur intended for a whisper, "I have made a most marked and distinct advance in your favour to-day. The cause is moving, dear boy—the cause is moving."

"I hope it is," said Weatherley, doubtfully feeling for a bit of whisker and finding none. "I'm getting a bit down-hearted about it; but that's no use, is it, Bassett?"

"Not a bit, dear boy," said the other, "not a bit. By the way, I got a card for one of Dexter's Fridays this afternoon. Mary received one also, and I have just dropped a line to Dexter asking him to send one to a friend of mine—Mr. George Weatherley, at the Albany. Now I think it is very probable that you may find your opportunity that evening. It may prove to be a favourable time. Don't call in the meantime. I shall be a little late, of course, but Mary will be pretty early. God bless you, dear boy. One word. Don't say anything decisive until you see me. Good-bye, dear boy, and God bless you."

Five minutes later Mr. Weatherley was in the Strand, walking with a pensive countenance. As he walked his lips moved, and though the murmurs which escaped him were inaudible to the passers-by, it may be guessed that he was practising a form of declaration.

The hours between then and the fateful Friday fled with leaden wing, but the night came at last, and Mr. Weatherley was amongst the first to arrive at Dexter's halls. He wandered disconsolate out of one room into the other,

nervously pulling his gloves off and on and furtively surveying himself in mirrors, un-at-home amidst the crowd of artists and journalists who elbowed him. There were ladies there upon whose trains his inadvertent feet seemed doomed to tread, and he had just apologised to one of them for the third time when the host came by with open hands to greet a newly-arrived party of four

"Miss Leverett, delighted. Leverett, my boy, delighted. Cassidy, how are you? Cameron, where have you been hiding yourself?"

Mr. Weatherley turned and beheld within six feet of him the man he had last seen at Oakenham in the act of kissing Mary Bassett. Now, Jack did not know Mr. Weatherley from Adam, and received his indignant and withering stare with some astonishment. Mr. Weatherley, having put up an eye-glass with intent to make his glance more deadly, measured Jack slowly from head to foot, and turning round upon his heel trod a fourth time upon the fated lady's train, and buried dignity and loathing in the dust of abject apology.

In spite of her father's promise Mary came late—so late, indeed, that she arrived but some ten minutes before the great tragedian himself, when Mr. Weatherley was

almost driven to desperation by the agony of waiting and the knowledge of the presence of his whilom rival.

"There's one young person here," said Jack to Cassidy, as they stood aside, "who seems to be a little cracked. He favoured me with a look from head to heel just now, and turned away with a grunt of ineffable disdain. That's the fellow, with the eye-glass, the fellow next to Leverett, on the right."

"Bedad," said Cassidy, "'tis young Weatherley, of Oakenham."

Jack's face darkened, and he surveyed the young fellow moodily. It was likely enough that the youngster knew him and had heard of his old suit. Was it possible that Bassett and his daughter were expected? That would account for the young man's presence, and his scowl of defiance. Cameron's heart began to beat quickly, and the old wound began to ache. It ached always, but now there was a sudden leap of pain. Cassidy was talking, but he heard nothing until within six feet of him a voice said clearly and softly:—

"Good evening, Mr. Weatherley."

The rooms were well filled by this time, and there was a subdued roar of talk going on, but just at that instant almost everybody had gone silent. The silence lasted scarcely more

than a second, and the clear, soft voice just fitted into it. Jack turned, and there stood Mary with her face sideways to him, looking radiant. A little more spiritual than she had used to be, less saucy and mirthful, but bright and something more than cheerful. She was beautifully dressed, and the discarded lover, looking at her, thought she had never looked so charming. There were none of the traces of the many tears she had shed to be seen upon her face, there was no sign of the heart-break she had endured—nothing to speak from her to him, and to tell him how vilely he had been abused. He was haggard and gloomy, and unlike himself of little more than half-a-year ago, and he knew it. Good-natured friends reminded him of it more than often enough. Well, if he had thought of seeing her again he had not expected to find her changed. Why should she be? A heart so shallow and hollow—what could it feel? She had vowed she loved him, she had let him take her in his arms and look into her eyes—they looked as clear as day, and as honest as the sun—and with his kisses on her lips she had thrown him over. And he?—he had learned his lesson, and knew of what stuff women's hearts were made.

All this took little time to think and feel,

and it was all thought and felt whilst Mr. Weatherley bashfully, and with an embarrassed gesture, shook hands with Mary Bassett. But that young gentleman, being conscious of Cameron's presence and his fixed regard, could not keep his eyes from straying in his direction, and his glance took Mary's with it.

The two estranged lovers, who had loved so dearly and had suffered so for each other, stood face to face. There was a bitter smile on Jack's lips, and such a disdain in his eyes as a woman who had been false to him would have found it hard to bear. The blood forsook the girl's cheeks and she trembled, but she drew her slight figure to its full height, and replied to his cynical glance by one as contemptuous and as cold. They stood thus only for a second or two, but it seemed a long time afterwards when each came to think of it. Then a change came over Jack's face, which puzzled and haunted the girl for many and many a day. The new look meant pity and reproach—pity as profound as a mother's over a sick child; reproach as keen as loyalty's looking on dishonour. She read these as plainly as she might have done in a printed page, and she saw the swift glint of tears in his eyes as he turned away. What right had he—he—to look at her like that?

But for that strange momentary encounter, Mr. Weatherley would have got rid of his declaration that evening, and the girl would have said yes—not for his sake, but to please her father. That broad hint of his about the wearing of the willow had stung her too. But the wooer felt disconcerted and missed his chance. Indeed, the chance had gone in spite of him, for the girl's mind and heart were full of the memory of her old lover's look, and she traced over and over again in it, contempt, reproach, pity. Had they wronged him after all? Wronged him? From the night when he had won her promise to be his wife he had deserted her, and she had heard no word of him, except the story her father brought her. And his own silence proved that true. She knew him for the contemptible thing he was, she told herself a thousand times. Yet every time, as if in silent denial of all accusations, his face rose up before her with its changing glance. Contempt, reproach, and pity.

She cried herself to sleep that night, and in her dreams he kissed her, and she heard him say, so clearly that the voice awoke her to the comfortless winter dawn: "Dear eyes! they shall never shed another tear if I can help it."

And the truth of day was back again, and he was false.

## CHAPTER VI.

"DEAR boy," said Mr. Bassett, sitting in young Weatherley's chambers at the Albany, "you missed a chance last night."

Young Weatherley was gloomy and inclined to be silent, and he answered only by a dismal shake of the head.

"I had carefully prepared her for a disclosure of your feelings," resumed the tragedian, "and, had you spoken, you would have received an affirmative answer. I trust you do not intend me to understand that you have fallen off in your pursuit."

"Now, Bassett, it isn't fair to say that of me," cried young Weatherley. "It isn't really, Bassett. If you'd have seen the way they looked at each other——. We'd only just shaken hands that minute when she saw him. I only wish it was possible to call a fellow out—don't you, Bassett? Hang him, the scoundrel; you'd have thought, to see the way he looked at her, that she'd been the one to behave badly. He's a bigger fellow than I am, but if it

hadn't been for the fear of making a disturbance in public, I'd have kicked him, if he'd been as big as St. Paul's. By gad, I would, Bassett!"

Mr. Weatherley looked and felt exceedingly warlike.

"Was Mary very much disturbed, dear boy?" asked the tragedian.

"Disturbed!" cried young Weatherley. "She went as white as a ghost, and I could see her tremble, but she looked at him like a queen, by gad, as much as to say 'you dam rascal!' and she held her eyes on him till he turned away, by gad, like a dog. And that's what he is, by gad, a cur, a mean cur, isn't he, Bassett?" The tragedian took his young friend by the hand, averting his face, and then strode to the window, where he drummed with agitated fingers on the board, to show how moved he was. The youngster began to fidget about the room, taking up books and laying them down again, standing to inspect with unobservant eye the drawings on the wall, walking rapidly into corners without object, and giving other evidences of a disturbed mind. The actor held his tongue, and in a little time Mr. Weatherley's excitement of spirit boiled over into speech. "Look here, Bassett," said the lad, advancing to him with a pale and dis-

ordered countenance, "I can't stand it any longer. It's wearing me to a shadow, by George it is. I can't eat and I can't sleep, and if I go to a theatre, I feel, by gad, like a mute at a funeral, upon my word I do. You don't mind waiting here, do you, Bassett! You can make yourself comfortable for a couple of hours, can't you? And I'll take a cab, and I'll drive up to Bloomsbury Square, and I'll have it over."

"Dear boy," said Mr. Bassett, shaking hands anew. "I do petition all the gods for thy prosperity."

After that interview with his daughter, Mr. Bassett felt tolerably sure of her acceptance of young Weatherley's hand. There is nothing in the world so open to conviction as a man's own conscience, and the first remorse was over and done with. Jack Cameron had behaved very ill, and he—Montgomery Bassett—had been, somehow or other, deeply wronged, and the resentment natural to the circumstances kept him warm. Mary was not ill any longer, and her sufferings though sharp, had been brief (or at least he was willing to think so), and now she would be a great deal better off than she could ever have hoped to be but for the benevolent practices of her father. So that altogether he experienced a glow of self-approval, and felt

himself a watchful and tender guardian of his child's best interests.

He sat alone in young Weatherley's luxurious sitting-room, and devoted himself moderately, since he had his evening's work before him, to young Weatherley's whiskey, which was old and ripe and mellow, and smoked his cigars, which, like everything else the young fellow had, were of the best. He had put the case plainly and forcibly to his daughter, and she would say "Yes" to the wealthy wooer's proffer, and her poor old father's worldly troubles would all be over. The poor old father, with his glass in his hand and a cigar between his lips, looked round the room with a glance of approval. He fancied it his own, and surveyed it already with the pleased eye of a proprietor. George would not want bachelor chambers when he was married, and this would make a snug little place enough for his father-in-law. Mr. Bassett would arrange that. A man in Weatherley's position could not afford to have a poor father-in-law; and five hundred a year, which would be ample provision for Mr. Bassett's retirement, would be but a flea-bite from the young fellow's fortune. Mr. Bassett would arrange that also.

Once or twice he mended and stirred the fire, and the afternoon was already growing dark

before the owner of the rooms returned. The tragedian heard the latch-key at the door, and a second or two later Weatherley entered.

"Well, dear boy," said Mr. Bassett, in his richest and most ponderous tones, "Am I to congratulate you?"

Young Weatherley returned no answer, but sat down with his hat on. An awful doubt began to rise in the tragedian's heart.

"What is this, dear boy?" he asked.

Was Mary away from home for the afternoon? Had the courtier's courage failed him? Anything rather than the real question.

"She's thrown me over," said young Weatherley, with something very like a sob.

"Refused you?" cried Bassett.

"She was very kind and nice and all that," said the youngster tremulously, "but she says she'll never marry. She heard everything I had to say, and then she said 'No.' They say Russia's going to war directly, and by George I'll go out and fight for the Turks, and get shot, by gad!"

His voice quivered pitiably, and there were tears in his eyes. Bassett could see them sparkle darkly by the firelight. His own heart was dead within him.

"I—I can't understand it at all, dear boy," he stammered.

"It's plain enough," said young Weatherley, with a catch in his voice. "She can't forget that fellow, though she hates him, and she'll never care to look at another fellow. That's what she said, 'I shall never marry.'"

The tragedian's distress was as profound as that of the rejected lover. All his visions crumbled, and he stood amidst their ruins in dismay.

"Girls are not to be had for one asking, dear boy," he said after an agitated pause, during which he had striven to get the better of these fears. "You were too soon dismayed."

"No," said young Weatherley hopelessly, "I know better than that, Bassett. She doesn't care about me, and the money hasn't any weight with her, and by gad, I honour her for that; upon my word I do."

"I can't help believing," said Mr. Bassett, "that your cause is not yet lost, dear boy. Pluck up heart of grace, and I will speak to her this evening. When last I spoke to her—it was the first and last and only time—she left me under the impression that the thing was settled, in your favour."

Mr Weatherley took off his hat and unaffectedly wiped his eyes, making no response to his companion.

"You don't resign the chase, dear boy?" said Bassett, trying to speak in a tone of badinage.

"She said 'No,' and she meant it," answered Weatherley. "That's enough for me."

"Don't despair, dear boy," cried the actor, recovering a little hope and courage. "Girls do not always know their minds. I have never pretended to disguise my feelings in respect to the honour you proposed to do my daughter and myself. I think, as I have always thought, that the match would be a most fortunate and advantageous one for her, and I am now more assured than ever of your regard, and more convinced than ever that if you could secure her consent you would make her happy. At present she is not happy, and as sweet Will says, dear boy, 'She is all the daughters of her father's house, and all the brothers too,' and I am anxious for her welfare. I will speak to her, dear boy. She will listen to her father."

"I don't think it's of any use, Bassett," said the rejected lover, wiping his eyes again; "and if she's unhappy already, I don't want to have her bothered about me."

"God forbid," said Mr. Bassett piously, "that I should press my child upon a luke-

warm lover! But this I know—she was not so resolved when last we spake together.”

Even at this pass a rounded, well-mouthed quotation was like meat and drink to him, and he rolled the words out royally.

“No,” said young Weatherley, with mournful protestation, “you can’t say I’ve been lukewarm, now can you, Bassett?”

“You seem a little so now, dear boy,” returned the tragedian. “Shall I speak for you?”

“Do you think it’s any good?” asked the rejected lover.

“Dear boy,” said Mr. Bassett, warming as he spoke, and beginning to feel half confident of success. “The gyurl is coy. She has experienced a severe shock. She has had her first lesson in the untrustworthiness of the world, and she is not willing for a time to believe in anything. But, thank Heaven, she has not yet lost faith in her poor old father.”

Even young Weatherley began to think there might be something in it, and to feel the warmth of hope again.

“It isn’t as if we were asking her to do anything to make herself unhappy, is it, Bassett?” the lad demanded. “I am sure I’ll try to make her happy. There’s nothing a

woman's heart can wish for that she sha'n't have. She's only got to ask for it and she shall have it."

"We are signally united," said Mr. Bassett, seeing his way to something to his own advantage here. "We are signally united, my little gyurl and I. The greatest difficulty I shall experience, dear boy, will be in persuading her to part from her unworthy father. It is chiefly for my sake, as I am well persuaded, that she has refused your offer. She fears to leave the old man lonely."

"You could come down and see us, you know, Bassett, couldn't you?" said young Weatherley, rather miserably, as if he cared little for the prospect.

"Yes, yes, dear boy," replied the tragedian. "But would that content her?"

"Well, by gad, Bassett," cried the other, with an evident reluctance pulling at the skirts of eagerness, "so far as that goes, you know, if she wont have me without it, you might come and stay with us, mightn't you now? Just to begin with, you know."

"Exactly, dear boy," said Mr. Montgomery Bassett. "Just to begin with. Exactly." But in fancy's eyes he saw himself settled for life in that handsome mansion of warm brown stone in which he had once tasted of

Mr. Weatherley's hospitality. The old oak, the liquidly-lustrous mahogany, the soft receptive carpets, the rich hangings—he walked or lolled among these splendours as if they were all his own. Perhaps the earlier vision of that afternoon might come true, later on, and the admirably-appointed room he stood in might one day be his own. He began to feel, under the influence of these hopes, that his wandering life had left him a little battered; that he was not so young as he had been; that it was time to retire from the stage in full blaze of fame, and to make room for a younger man. And all these advantages, to his energetic imagination, became so real that he actually appropriated them, and felt that they belonged to him already. Mary would never refuse a prospect which looked so rose-coloured. It was lovely and enviable to him, and the natural conclusion was that it would be lovely and enviable to her also. The case he had to lay before her looked irresistible, and he was almost easy and happy in his mind again.

It was too late at this hour to find time to plead with his daughter before his duties began at the theatre, and perhaps it might be as well to allow her a little rest.

“You shall hear from me, dear boy, to-

morrow," he said, as he shook hands after some further talk. Mr. Weatherley was a little cheered, but being left alone became once more despondent, and held but a poor view of his chances.

"I ain't worthy of her," said the young gentleman despondently. "I know I ain't; and even if she marries me, she'll do it because her father persuades her, and not because she cares for me." He was not the wisest of mankind, and there may have been men in the world who knew more loftily how to love a woman, but that reflection was unpleasantly bitter, none the less, though he would have taken her, if she would have accepted him, on any grounds whatever.

But while young Weatherley endured the pains natural to his circumstances, Mr. Bassett took his evening chop and his glass of Burgundy in mental comfort. Mary had not weighed the matter, or something in the lad's wooing had jarred upon her, or she was out of sorts, perhaps. There were a thousand reasons to be had in explanation of her conduct, for the mere trouble of stretching out a hand for them. As for the nonsensical supposition that she had thrown away five-and-twenty thousand pounds a year—he had repeated those figures so often that he knew them to be true—Bassett refused to enter-

tain it. The very wine he drank repudiated that absurdity, and protested in his veins against it.

He dined that night at an old-fashioned Fleet Street tavern where he knew the wine, and where the waiter knew *him*, and gave him of the best. That generous Burgundy was kept for the old stagers, and no new arrival at the house would ever taste it. He finished his bottle, lit his cigar, drank his one glass of hot whiskey and water, and demanded his bill.

“What of the night, John?”

“Snowing pretty heavy, sir,” said ancient John, “but no chance of the snow lying, sir. Streets’ll be full of slush, sir, that’s all. Thank you, sir. Good-night, sir.”

Mr. Bassett slowly and luxuriously built up his portly form in a big overcoat, and drew on his furred gloves. He was almost due, but yet in easy time, and with the wine and his own contentment warm within him, he marched comfortably through the night and the snow, and being arrived at his room, dressed and awaited his call, above a second glass of hot whiskey and water. The piece was drawing crowds, and the house was fairly filled in spite of the wretched weather. The eminent tragedian scorned the play, and had none of that striding and muttering to do between the scenes or in the pauses of his own part which would have been

*en règle* in legitimate Shakespearian business, and he had therefore the more time to sit beside his dressing-room stove and sip hot whiskey and water. People talked of that growing habit of his already, and though it had never yet betrayed him in his business, he trenched narrowly at times upon a dangerous excess. To-night, what with the cold airs on the great draughty stage, and the length of time his duties left him free, and the cheerful visions he indulged and saw brighter through the spirituous fumes, he drank so freely that his head was whirling a little when the curtain fell, and his rich and ponderous voice was less under control than common.

The snow was falling faster and faster when he looked out from the stage door, and for some ten minutes he awaited in vain the return of the messenger he had despatched for a cab. He fell into a little lordly rage at this, and demanding that the vehicle when found should be sent after him, he betook himself to the Albany, near at hand, and meeting there a half-score of his professional brethren, joined them in a social glass.

Notwithstanding the non-arrival of the cab, he was by this time in the very best and jolliest of humours, and the future seen through vinous and spirituous mists looked so sure and solid that he took his daughter's acceptance of young Weatherley as a fact accomplished, and asked one

or two of his older friends to be present at the wedding. It had been the common talk for months past that young Weatherley and Miss Bassett were engaged, but all things considered, the marriage had seemed curiously long in coming, and now that it was announced as imminent, the great tragedian was congratulated with such heartiness as you may fancy. He had always been popular and successful, and like men in other professions, actors like to know the popular and successful.

"Mont., dear boy," and "Bass., dear boy," said the unctuous bass voices round him, as their owners touched glasses with him, and the eminent comedian from the corner said, "Monty, ye deserve to be congratulated," in a voice so natural and like his own that two men from Magdalen were convulsed at his resemblance to himself, and felt proud to stand within a yard of so much greatness. All this kindness and geniality on the part of Mr. Bassett's old friends led naturally to more drinking, and when at length, after a search of half-an-hour, the messenger returned with a cab, the great man was in a glow of mingled prosperity and fatherly sentiment the like of which he had never felt before.

The snow lay so thickly on the streets that the cab bore him homewards in a curious, ghostly quiet.

The flakes fell so close together that the driver could scarcely see the way before him, and once or twice missed his turning. But Mr. Bassett, sitting snugly within the vehicle, was wrapped in his own bright dreams, and was in a condition to think the night Venetian. Arrived at his own door he feed the cabman munificently, and entered. He was so old a toper that even now he gave but little sign of the evening's deep drinking, and an unsuspecting eye might have passed over that little easily. His daughter awaiting him beside a cheerful fire in the sitting-room, rose at his entrance, and kissed him with something more than her usual tenderness, and with no suspicion. She went to bed before his arrival, or sat up to await him, as she chose, and there was nothing remarkable in her being there.

She, like himself, had been occupied with thoughts of the afternoon's refusal. He had always been a kind father, easy and indulgent, and she was too ignorant and unworldly to guess the importance he was likely to attach to young Weatherley's proposal. He would be disappointed. So much she knew. Yet she had but to tell him how distasteful the thought of marriage was, to have him on her side at once. His beaming smile, and the joyous air with which he clapped his hands and rubbed them at the

fire, persuaded her that he knew nothing of the day's proceedings.

"My dear," said Mr. Bassett, speaking rather thickly, "I am glad to find you out of bed, for I have something of great importance to say to you."

"Yes?" she answered drawing an ottoman near to his side and laying her cheek lightly against his breast. She was young to have found life so hard and love so false, but she had her refuge there. Her cheek caressed him as it lay above his heart. Her refuge there—her refuge there.

"Some little gyurlish coyness, dear," he said, caressing her soft hair, and speaking with a foolish thickness in his voice, "persuaded you to say 'No' to young Weatherley this afternoon. You must say 'Yes,' my child. You must say 'Yes.'"

"No, no, papa," said the girl nestling a little closer yet, and possessing herself of one of his hands. "Let me be happy as I am."

"My child," he said, with a spirituous tear in either eye, "you are not happy as you are." His own sensibility naturally pleased him, and he was satisfied to know how good a heart he had, and how kind a father he had always been and would be. "Confess it my darling. You are not happy as you are."

"I am not very happy," she answered, "and I do not think the world is a very happy place, papa." She tried to say this lightly, as if there were half a jest in it. "But I am nearer being happy here than I can ever be anywhere else, and you must let me stay with you."

"My darling," he responded, still stroking her head as it nestled at his breast, "there is no question of division between us. Young Weatherley has most generously asked me to share his home. Think, my dear. Is there nothing admirable and generous in the heart which offers an asylum for your father's age?"

"I am sorry, dear," she answered, "I am very sorry, dear, if you are disappointed."

His hand ceased to stroke her hair, and he looked down at her in a momentary half-drunken anger. But remembering even then that that was scarcely the way to win her to his purposes, he controlled himself, and sent his hand to its old task again.

"You will not disappoint me, dear," he said. "If I tell you once more how much I desire this union, if I let you see clearly how much it means to me, you will not disappoint me."

"I tried to think of it," she answered, "and I found I could not. You must not be too disappointed, for really I shall be happy, very, very happy here with you."

They were at cross purposes without either knowing it. She thought he pleaded for her sake, and so did he.

"My darling," he said with affected solemnity, "you must reconsider your determination."

"No, papa," she answered, "I am quite content with you. I shall never marry."

His visions began to waver and crumble, and he felt how intolerable it was that his own daughter should destroy such splendid prospects as lay before him.

"My—my dear," he said in a voice somewhat raised, but not much, "this peevish nonsense is unworthy of my daughter."

The girl drew herself away and looked at him, and saw for the first time that he had been drinking. This discovery brought her no alarm and no disgust, for custom blunts the finest senses, and she had seen the signs before. As a rule, when Montgomery Bassett had exceeded the reasonable, he made for bed, and was not sullen, or humorous, or affectionate, or maudlin, or quick in quarrel, but simply and purely sleepy.

"I am tired, papa," said Mary, rising, "and I must say good-night."

"My child," her father answered, also rising, "you must not say good-night until we have settled this matter. I must have your promise." His tone was not yet angry, but it expressed

more than the girl cared to answer to in such a case.

"Papa," she responded quietly, "Mr. Weatherley has my answer."

"You are not refusing Mr. Weatherley now," cried Mr. Bassett. "Your father pleads before you for an asylum for his own grey hairs."

*In vino veritas.* For the first time in her life she began to understand him. But having loved and honoured him her whole life long, she took this revelation of himself as an aberration from himself. Then (since it was unnatural in her to think ill of any one, and doubly hard to think it of her father) her ideas underwent a change. He put it in that way to have weight with her, believing that she might be happier if she yielded.

"We will speak of these things in the morning, papa," she answered, "if they must be spoken of. Good-night, dear."

As she advanced to kiss him, he laid a hand upon each of her shoulders, and rocked her gently to and fro. Her slight form answered to the motion of his hands as a willow wand might have done, and a sense of his own strength and of her weakness gave him, not tenderness, but power, and spurred the anger rising in his heart. It was so safe to be courageous here.

"Mary." The magnificent bass voice throbbed

a little in its sound, like notes of a viol, and he had ears for it. And, what with the thousand and one suggestions of dramatic passion that lay in it for his own flayed nerves and whiskeyfied fancy, it helped as much as anything to spur him on. "I demand your answer now."

This was new in her experience, and it startled her a little.

"Say good-night, dear," she asked, a shade too cool and disdainful in her tone.

"I will not say good-night," he answered. "I will have your answer now. The power and corrigible authority of this lies in my will."

"Let me go," she said, almost scornful by this time; "you hurt my shoulders. Let me go."

"Stand still," he answered, with his hands heavier upon her. "Listen to me. I have besought you long enough."

Her disdain all melted into pity and distress.

"Pray—pray, papa, go to bed, and let us speak of this in the morning. You are not like yourself to-night. You are not quite—master of yourself, dear."

"I demand your answer now," was all he said.

"You have my answer," she answered, in a new disdain.

"I will not take it for an answer," he growled back at her, in a suppressed tone of professional tragedy. "I am desperate of my fortunes if

they check me here. I command you, revise your answer," She began to think him dangerous, but her own anger rose.

"Had I too much trust in the world already that you need teach me such a lesson of yourself, papa? Let me go."

"You will not accept young Weatherley?" he asked, with his mobile eyebrows wandering fearfully about his forehead. He controlled his own facial expression with perfect consciousness, and yet it egged him on.

"I will not, papa," she answered.

"You shall," he cried, letting the magnificent voice free, for the first time. "You shall; or, if that your jesses were my dear heartstrings, I'd whistle you off, and let you down the wind, to prey at fortune."

"Reserve Othello's speeches for the stage, dear," said his daughter. She had loved and honoured him always until now, and the contempt of her own words and her own voice broke her down, so that she began to cry. Mr. Montgomery Bassett began to think this the way to take with her.

"Give me your answer,"

"You have my answer," she flashed back at him, through her tears. "How dare you—oh, papa, how dare you teach me to despise you so?"

The crumbled hopes, now, beyond rebuild-

ing, gone to pieces; the seductions of a magnificent voice, the charm of unrehearsed tragedy, the glow of whiskey, and that stale, flogged demon of the boards, were all at work at once within him. And he had so rarely had the chance to be courageous, with any degree of safety, off the stage, that even that element was worth counting here.

"To despise me!" cried the great tragedian. "'Twas this flesh begot this pelican daughter. *Hysterica passio*—down, thou climbing sorrow! Thy element's below." He was away now, and had flogged himself beyond his own control. "Obey me, or leave the house."

He had released her, in order to be free to gesticulate, but he turned upon her now so wildly that the girl cowered for a moment under his flaming eyes, and threatening hands, and terrible, stormy voice. Her fear was that he was mad. And his hope in the midst of his self-galled madness was, that she might yield, and save him from a violence from which he could only retreat to look ridiculous. For a man who thought as well of himself as Montgomery Bassett did, it was impossible to look ridiculous, voluntarily.

"Obey me, or leave the house," he thundered, standing over her.

"Papa," she cried, imploring him, "speak of

these things to-morrow. You are not yourself to-night. No, no, no, no, dear, no. Papa, papa!"

She was yielding now, thought Montgomery Bassett.

"Your answer. Your answer. For the last time, your answer."

"Let us speak of it to-morrow," she besought him, "when you are master of yourself again."

"Yes or no?" roared the leonine voice. Mr. Bassett found this unrestricted play of emotion curiously enjoyable. The girl would yield, and he would have justified authority. He saw signs of yielding in her, and Hope's swift hands built up a new palace from the dust and rubbish of the old. "Yes or no?"

"No," cried the girl, facing him with a passion more genuine than his own. Hope's new built palace fell to dust again.

"Ingrate!" cried Mr. Bassett wrathfully.

It was easy enough to cry "Ingrate," without attaching any particular meaning to the word, and easy enough to go striding up and down the room with dramatic gesture: but it was hard to carry out the alternative to which he had pledged himself. Perhaps Mary had relied on that, he thought, and had no belief in the earnestness of his threat. He knew that he had never meant to carry it into execution,

and had never meant that it should become necessary. And if he threatened it a little further she might believe in it, and yield.

“Leave the house,” he said, pale and gasping. He had not invoked the tide for nothing, and it swept him away. He had been a scoundrel without profiting by it, and had broken her heart for nought. He would have his way and justify his crime. “Promise, or leave the house.”

“Leave the house?” she repeated, in white-hot scorn by this time. “I will not leave the house. How dare you speak of such a thing to me?”

Anything was fit to be a justification for his passion now. He flung the door open and thundered to her—

“Leave the house!”

She stood erect, with pale face and heaving bosom, and he seized her by the arm, and haled her towards the door. Even then a word might save him, but she looked at him like a defiant queen, and her words had no submission.

“I will save you that,” she said, and he releasing her, she walked, with a false composure, down the stairs. Even yet, if he played out his part, it might save them both; and, passing her, he laid a hand upon the door.

“Promise,” he gasped, “or leave the house!”

She waved him on one side, and he threw the door open. The drifting snow fluttered half-way up the hall, and the street was white, but no whiter than his face or hers.

"Is this a chamber for your only child?" she asked him, stretching out her hand towards the gusty street, and the black waste of the open square.

Was she yielding, Mr. Montgomery Bassett asked himself. He could not yield. He could only gasp at her once more, for all the terror of his own wickedness—

"Promise, or leave the house!"

She walked straight into the blinding snow without a look or a word. He whispered "Come back," but only whispered it; and when he turned distractedly, he faced the man and woman of the house, who looked on, white with wonder and dismay.

"What have you done?" cried the woman. "Mr. Bassett, for the love of God, what have you?"

"Done!" he cried, his face working horribly. "Done! an awful duty! I have cleared my house of shame!"

"Run," cried the woman to her husband, and the man shuffled past the tragedian into the street. "I wouldn't have served a dog like that on such a night," cried the landlady.

"If she's done wrong, and I won't believe it of her, it makes no difference to your villainy."

All the miserable emotion on which he had relied failed him now that his tragic farce had reached to the last act.

"I have gone too far," he said, with a professional tragedy sob or two; for he was acting still, and could not help it. "I meant the warning for her good, but I have gone too far. Bring her in again: but let me see her no more to-night."

Perturbed as he was, he went upstairs with the professional tragedy stagger of the father whose heart is pierced by a daughter's shame and folly; and even when he was alone he lashed his remorse as he had lashed his anger. It was half-an-hour later when the landlord returned, with the snow thick upon his garments.

"I haven't seen a sign of her, Mr. Bassett," he said, standing at the tragedian's doorway. "I've warned the police to look out for her and take care of her, but if she makes a hole in the water you've got yourself to blame this night."

"Man," cried Mr. Bassett, staggering at him, "leave me to my misery!"

The landlord had admired his tenant's Othello on the stage, but to have Othello in the house, with that throbbing organ voice and those wild

eyes, was too much for him, and he fled. He and his wife sat the night out by the kitchen fire, but the police brought no news, and the tragedian's heavy tread paced about the house, now upstairs and now downstairs, until the morning dawned.

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## CHAPTER VII.

THE date on which Mr. William Cassidy had fixed for the termination of his bachelor life had arrived and gone by, and he was still a bachelor. It was not that the course of true love ran anything but smooth with him, for Miss Leverett, to whom he was affianced, was like Poor Tom Bowling's sweetheart, "kind and fair." It was not that William's fancy ranged as it had been wont to do. For a wonder, William having won the prize seemed content to wear it, and he dined at Maida Vale on Sundays with an unbroken regularity. The fact was, that when everything was ready, the intended bridegroom was compelled to confess his poverty, and the match was postponed. The revelation came about rather quaintly. William, with full intent to confess his financial position, had taken a cab from the Cannibals to Maida Vale, and at the moment of starting was in possession of the sum of five snillings and no more. As he tendered one half-crown to the cabman he dropped the other. The night was rainy, the street was dark, and search

was hopeless. He stood at the door of his sweetheart's house a penniless man.

The cabman drove off, and Mr. Cassidy, having ineffectually searched a square yard of mud with the point of his cane, gave it up. Suddenly he became conscious of an inspiration.

"'Twas a godsend to lose it," he cried joyously, and advancing to the house he rang the bell and was admitted. "Mary, me darlin'," he said to the maid who opened the door, "I want to see Mr. Leverett alone. If he's in, tell him a gentleman wants to see him on urgent private business."

"Do ha' done, Mr. Cassidy," said Mary, "or else I'll tell Miss Matilda."

"It's not in your charmin' heart to be so crool," said William, "and I know it. Now that's the last of 'em, and you can go."

The maid departed, adjusting her cap as she went, and the visitor waited in the hall. By-and-bye the master of the house came downstairs, a hearty man of five-and-forty.

"Hillo!" he cried. "This you, Bill? The girl said a gentleman wanted to see me."

"Thank you," said the visitor drily.

"Not at all," cried the host. "Come in here." Cassidy followed him into a side room, and closed the door stealthily.

"Horace, my boy," said he, looking confused

and flurried, "I'm here on a most unpleasant errand. I've bad news for you."

"Out with it," said Mr. Leverett, squaring his shoulders.

"There's been a fall in silver," said William, "and I've lost the last halfpenny I had in the world."

"Now look here, Bill Cassidy," said Miss Leverett's father, "I know you of old, and I'm going to deal plainly with you. I told you long ago, Bill, in a perfectly friendly spirit, that if you wanted to play the fool with a young woman you mustn't do it with my daughter. I wont have it. Now, what do you want?"

"I want to stay execution—if that's the legal term," said William. "It's a solemn truth, upon my word of honour, that I told you just now. There's been a fall in silver. It's no trope, Horace, it's no flight o' fancy. It's a fact, a literal fact; and I have not one penny piece in the world."

"Bill," said Mr. Leverett, solemnly, "I wont stand it. I told you at the beginning, 'Don't start this unless you mean to go through with it, because I *wont* have the little girl's feelings tampered with.' Now, didn't I?"

"Ye did," said William, mournfully assenting.

"Well, I'm going to keep you to it."

"Horace," said William, who was much moved

by this statement, "ye're a true friend. If all their fathers had have behaved like this I'd have been a polyglot long ago. But you don't want us to spend the wedding night in a casual ward. I'll tell ye now. 'Twas me own foolish hurry that did it. I might have known I wouldn't be ready in time."

"And have prophesied the fall in silver?" asked Mr. Leverett.

William grinned mournfully.

"Horace," he said, "with a resolute father like yourself to back me, I'm as true as the needle to the pole. I am really in earnest. I am sincerely and devotedly attached to the little girl. I mean business. I wouldn't leave her to marry a duchess. But I've been unlucky, and all me pictures are hangin' about in the shops, and none of them sellin'. There's no taste for art now-a-days."

"Well, what delay do you want? I'm not going to agree to a postponement *sine die*. A month?"

"I can't be ready in that time," answered William.

"Two months?"

"Nor in that either. I'm afraid I'll want six at least."

"Split the difference and make it four," said Mr. Leverett.

"Done," returned William, with subdued exultation.

"Wait a bit," said Miss Leverett's father, with a calculating air. "What does it cost you per week to live?"

"I don't know, upon me word."

"Can you get along on three pounds a week?"

"Can I?" demanded Mr. Cassidy. "Like a flea with a fat baby for a freehold."

"What did you get for the girls and the poodle?"

William caught something of his future father-in-law's business aspect.

"Five-and-twenty pounds. But the frame cost five-and-thirty shillings."

"And how long did it take you?"

"About ten days, off and on," answered William.

"More off than on, I expect," said Mr. Leverett, severely. "Now I have a proposal to make to you. I shall become your banker." Mr. Cassidy made an instant movement to shake hands, but the stern parent repelled him. "I shall allow you three pounds a week, and pay it to you every Saturday. In return you will make over to me every picture you have now in your possession and all you may paint in future so long as this arrangement remains in force. I shall hold the said pictures in trust for you, and

shall sell them to the best advantage. Then I shall bank the money in Matilda's name, and when you have two hundred pounds in hand you'll have to get married; because I'm not going to have the little girl trifled with. Now then, Bill, what do you say? Yes or No?"

"Bedad, then," said Mr. Cassidy, "I'll say 'yes, and thank ye kindly.' It'll be the first chance I ever had of seeing a regular income, and be Moses, Horace, ye'll make a man of me, after all. But make it two pounds in place of three. They say if you give the horses in Asia Minor corn it kills them, and I'm a bit like that meself."

"The principle is the main thing," said Mr. Leverett, "and that seems to be agreed upon. We can discuss the details of the measure later on. I'll call on you to-morrow, and in the meantime we'll go upstairs and see Mrs. Leverett and Matilda."

Miss Leverett was a pretty young woman of about twenty, and Mrs. Leverett, who ought perhaps to have been mentioned first, a pretty, middle-aged woman of about forty.

"Upon me word, Mrs. Leverett," said the newcomer with his charming Irish impudence, "you have no right to be looking like that. If it weren't for Horace and Matilda, and maybe an

objection on your own part, I'd run away with you."

"For shame, William," said Matilda. Mrs. Leverett laughed at him, but the master of the house, squaring his shoulders against the mantelpiece, opened his lips in rebuke.

"No levity to-night, Bill. This is a serious occasion. My dears, I have something to say to you. You, Mrs. Leverett, admitted this serpent," indicating William, "to our paradise. You, Miss Leverett, fell a ready prey to his wiles and blandishments. You were both fully acquainted with his character and antecedents, and you acted with your eyes open. Now, Bill, explain yourself."

Mr. Cassidy, thus unexpectedly brought to book, assumed an aspect of dejected humbleness.

"Mrs. Leverett," he began, "you have a heart that can feel for the unfortunate. Matilda, you have inherited your mother's virtues, and I can cast myself at your feet without a fear. I am, as you know, an exile and an orphan."

"No levity, Bill," said the master of the house.

"Levity?" answered William, with a voice of appeal. "In brief, Mrs. Leverett—in one word, Matilda—I am poor. The home I had hoped to rear for your daughter, madam, has crumbled

into ashes; and I am here to ask you to grant me a little time to build it up again." Miss Leverett, with a scared face, moved nearer to William, who directed one appealing glance at her.

"If you are poor, William," said Miss Leverett, "it will make no change in me."

"Nor in anybody else," said the master of the house, "for the very simple reason that it makes no change in him. He always was poor and he always will be; not because he has not considerable talent, not because he wants industry of a fitful and casual sort, not because he is vicious or addicted to expensive habits, but because he is Bill Cassidy. But I have taken him in hand." He began to explain his scheme, and his daughter kissed him for it. That kiss marked Mr. Cassidy's position in the household. It was plain that he was something to be looked after, and that he was not supposed to be altogether a responsible agent. He himself began to regard the future with complacency, and that careless, roving Irish eye saw the gleam of gold. William had no rooted dislike to work, and he had no vices. Now that somebody had undertaken to manage him he felt safe to get along.

"There'll be no cares on me mind," he said; "nothing to interrupt the flight of imagination. What is art without oydayas? and what man has oydayas when there's a process-server from the

tailor in the hall, and the landlord's threatening eviction in the studio?"

This was a fancy picture, for Jack Cameron had always taken good care of the landlord, but the terrors of the situation made a lively impression upon the ladies.

"But now," pursued Mr. Cassidy, "I've notions already. What d'ye think of an allegorical canvas, Horace, me boy? 'Genius delivered from Cupidity by Benevolence.' Meself for Genius, in a blue mantle, with me hair a bit would an' me legs bare. Ould Isaacs for Cupidity, with a knoife in one hand and a pair o' skeels in the other—a reminiscence o' Shakespeare, ye observe—and yourself between us with a full-blown halo on!"

"Pretty little girl and poodle," said Mr. Leverett. "That's your form. But now, Bill Cassidy, we have your faithful promise that you will work and be a good lad, and will do your best to justify our faith and our forgiveness." Mr. Leverett took the sting out of this by an assumption of the melodramatic manner, but William accepted it seriously.

"I would be a hound if I didn't. I'll never forget your kindness, Horace, or forgive meself if I prove unworthy of ut."

Mrs. Leverett and her daughter each wiped away a furtive tear, and the father and the lover

shook hands pathetically. When the lover went away, the scene at the hall-door between Miss Matilda and himself might have melted the most obdurate heart.

Next day Mr. Leverett appeared in the Howland Street studio, where he found the chums at work. He clapped Cameron on the shoulder.

"What have you been doing all this time, Jack? We never see you now. You've taken your name off at the Cannibals. What's the matter?"

"Nothing," said Jack quietly. "There are one or two people at the Cannibals whom I can't meet, that's all."

Cassidy shook his head at the guest as Jack turned round once more to his easel, and Leverett raised his eyebrows inquiringly.

"Come upstairs," said William, "and we can talk things over." Leverett, with a farewell word to Cameron, left the studio in William's rear and mounted to the sitting-room.

"I am athirst," he said. "Give the wanderer to drink."

"I will," said Cassidy. He rang the bell, and then threw open a locker in which some six or eight dozen soda-water bottles were arranged in order. Four of these he withdrew from the locker and laid upon the table. When the maid appeared, he waved his hand towards the table

with the single word "Bitter." The girl took up the bottles and disappeared, and the visitor looking at William, saw that he smiled with a singular look of self-gratification.

"What's the move?" inquired Leverett. Mr. Cassidy replied with an alacrity which made it evident he waited and expected to be asked.

"This," he replied re-opening the locker, "is—The Bank. I am—though ye mayn't think it—of a philosophical turn of mind, and sometimes I put two an' two together. Sometimes I am flush o' money for a day or so, and the question naturally arises—What's to be done with it? Now, nobody believes it of me, but I am really of a forecasting, provident nature. And my plan is to lay in something that'll be productive in a time of need. So, when I've a cheque for a picture, I lay in a gross of soda-water from me friend at the Lion, round the corner. On each bottle when returned I receive the sum of twopence. I've had to drink a dozen in the course of a winter's day at times (when Jack's been out of town and the exchequer's run dhry) to raise enough for dinner. That's a bit of a drawback, but on the whole the Bank works chormanly, an' I'm proud of the invention."

Mr. Leverett took the invention so to heart that he was speechless until the arrival of the beer, when, having refreshed himself, he

endeavoured to demonstrate, with the aid of pencil and paper, the fatal economic tendencies of the Bank. William listened respectfully, but remained unshaken.

"You've a good head for figures, Horace," he said, surveying the pencilled rows admiringly, "and the Lord knows, ye may be right after all, but the invention's been a true friend to me this many's the day, and I find it act very nicely, and, if ye don't mind, I'll hould on to it."

Mr. Leverett thereupon put his foot down.

"Now are you, or are you not, a hopeless bankrupt?"

"Bedad, I am," replied Cassidy.

"And am I, or are you, master of the present situation?"

"It's not me, any way," said the hopeless bankrupt.

"Then, Billy Cassidy," said Mr. Leverett sternly, "the Bank is doomed."

"I'm sorry for it," returned William mournfully. "It's like cuttin' the ground from undher a child that's learnin' to walk."

"I will not debase myself by further argument," said Leverett. "The Bank is doomed." William, after a lingering look at the stacked bottles, closed the door of the locker with a sigh.

"Nobody ever had a good word for it, except meself," he said sadly. "Jack always laughed at

it, but he's a Scotchman by descint, and a Scotch head was always impervious to an oydaya. 'Twas the only way of saving money I'll ever hit upon."

"When you are married," said Mr. Leverett, "you will be a good husband. You are just the man to be very fond of your wife, and to allow her to rule you so long as she does it gently. Matilda is a woman of business, and I can trust her to keep you straight. But finance is not your strong point, and you must have a controller. Now, are you in debt?"

"I believe I'm owing a trifle here an' there."

"Have you got the bills? You haven't? Do you know what you owe? You don't? Does anybody owe you money? How much? You don't know that either?"

It became abundantly evident that William knew nothing of his own affairs, and his future father-in-law was reduced to desperation when it came out that he was even ignorant of the number and the subjects of the pictures which lay in the hands of "Ould Isaacs." The position made a journey to old Isaacs necessary, and Mr. Leverett was maddened to discover that a sum of at least fifty pounds was due from the dealer to the artist.

"Why, isn't it better than knowing it?" asked Cassidy in genuine wonder at the other's wrath. "It's like picking it up in the street. If

I'd have known of it I'd have spent it, or paid it away, or lent it, and now I've got it, and still ye are riled. And ye call yourself a financier!"

"Well," said Leverett, "you wont spend it or lend it now, for I'll take care of it." William's countenance fell a little. "I've got you in hand, my lad, and I'll go through with you. When we get to your rooms again I'll give you a receipt for it, and I shall expect you to take care of all my receipts as I shall take care of yours."

"What's the need of receipts between you and me?" asked William.

"Business is business," said Mr. Leverett severely. "In a matter of business I would compel my own brother to give me black and white for everything."

"Ye're as bad as poor Jack Cameron," said Cassidy. "He hasn't a word o' trust for anybody, nowadays."

"What's the matter with Cameron?" asked Leverett. "He's a changed man altogether. What is it?"

"Bassett's girl threw him over to marry that young popinjay ye see at the Cannibals—young Weatherley. It seems she accepted Jack on a Sunday night, and it was to be quite a love match, for they'd neither of them a ten pound note in the world. But then, the same night, young Weatherley pro-

poses, and he's worth I don't know how much a year. So she throws Jack over and takes the money. 'Tis the wee with 'em at toimes, as ye know, Horace."

"I shouldn't have thought it of Bassett's girl," said Leverett. "And the poor lad's soured no doubt. Ah, well, it'll wear away."

"That's what I'm afraid it wont do," said Cassidy miserably. He was feather-headed enough, but he was faithful in friendship, and had a good heart when you got at it. "I never spoke a word to a soul about poor Jack, and I wouldn't now, only I know ye're as close as wax, and can be trusted. But she took his ring on Sunday night, and sent it back on Tuesday morning; and 'twas only Saturday last I was talkin' to him, an' tellin' him he was gettin' too hard an' worldly, and he takes out the ring from his waistcoat pocket with a laugh, and says he, 'There's my talisman, Bill. If ever I feel tempted to be such a fool as to trust a man or a woman again, I've only to look at that, and it'll cure me.' And there used not to be a sweeter-hearted lad in London, Horace. Its a transformation loike one o' Circe's. The lad's clean spoiled, and I am the only man in the world that he doesn't take for a scoundrel, and maybe that's only because he's known me long enough to foind out what a fool I am!"

## CHAPTER VIII.

MR. CASSIDY'S affairs being placed in the hands of his future father-in-law, and the pressure of immediate pecuniary liability being thus removed from his shoulders, he resumed something like his ancient gaiety of spirit. But his friend's ill-fortune in love still weighed upon him, and at times chilled, if it could not altogether freeze the genial current of his soul. If Jack Cameron had been contented to forget, and to act as if nothing had happened, Mr. Cassidy would have been contented also; but Jack was changed, and nothing of the genial lad of old days was left in him. He worked much harder and more successfully than ever, and people of note began to call upon him at odd times, and to take an interest in his doings. Whenever this gave him a chance to put in a good word for Cassidy he did it, but otherwise he seemed to care nothing for his own prosperity. Work was his only relaxation, and he took it in excess.

There came, amongst other visitors to the

Howland Street studio at this time, an American journalist, who was also a Colonel, as a good many American journalists are nowadays. Colonel Savage D. Sprague did not seem to have any particular business in the studio, and was so sad a man as to make it seem unlikely that he found pleasure there or elsewhere. For a hero—and he was a hero—he was wondrous mild, and for a man who had travelled almost everywhere—as he had—he was curiously quiet and reticent. When speech was unavoidable he spoke, but otherwise he held his tongue. He was so silent as a rule that Cassidy having extracted a “yes, sir,” and a “no, sir,” from him in an hour, spoke of him as having been loquacious that afternoon, and professed to look back on it as the Colonel’s champion conversational effort.

It came out in the course of time that Colonel Sprague could speak, and to the purpose. He called in at the studio one afternoon, and having shaken hands in mournful silence, took a seat, and chewed slowly at the end of an unlighted cigar for the space of an hour. The day was dull, and it looked as if snow were in the air. Jack wheeled his easel to the wall, lit his lamp, and sat down to an etching. Cassidy smoked, and lounged, and chattered, and the grave Colonel sat impassive.

"Mr. Cameron," he said at last, and the two artists turned to look at him. One of the merits of his ordinary silence was that when he did speak people listened to him. "I should like a word with you." The Colonel had a lingering accent, to which phonetics can do no justice. His voice was mild and a little higher-pitched than men's voices commonly are, and he spoke with the air of one who is deadly tired.

"If it's a private word—" said Cassidy. The Colonel, sitting in the shadow outside the little circle of keen light thrown by the shaded lamp, was dimly seen to nod. "I'll get," said William. The Colonel nodded again, and Cassidy disappeared.

"Mr. Cameron," said the Colonel in his own mild, sad manner, when they were alone, "you are in want of stirring up, sir."

"Oh!" said Jack, with a half-laugh.

"Yes, sir," returned the Colonel. "I should like to see you stirred, and I propose to do it."

"Indeed!" said Jack. "And how?"

"Your friend, Mr. Cassidy, sir," said the Colonel with slow deliberation, "has been showing me some of your literary work. I like the style. Of the poetry I am no judge, but the prose is straight and to the point, and from the shoulder. I am no great judge of art, but when a man can draw the human and the equine

figger, and does it—I can tell. You are the man I want, and now is the time I want you.”

“May I ask why?” asked Jack, pushing his tools aside.

“You may,” returned the Colonel gravely. “There is going to be a rumpus in the East, and I want a first-rate man who can write and sketch, and I want him upon the spot before the outbreak of hostilities. I do not want a reckless man, but I do want a live man who is not too conservative of his skin, and if I am not mistaken, I have found him. The highest terms I am authorised to offer are one hundred and twenty sterling pounds per month. Added to that his outfit and his travelling expenses, liberally calculated, out and home.”

“When do you want me to start?” asked Jack. He spoke quietly, but his blood was alive again for the first time for many a day.

“I know you speak German,” said the Colonel, “because I have heard you. You can buy what you want in Vienna. The Danube isn’t closed yet, Mr. Cameron, but it will be shortly, and you had best go that way to Nicopolis. If it will suit you to start to-morrow morning by the tidal train at seven, I shall be happy.”

“I shall want money,” said the painter.

“You shall have it,” returned the Colonel. “If you will come with me to the Viaduct

Hotel, we can sign, seal, and deliver straightway."

"I may tell Cassidy?" asked Jack.

"It's no secret, Mr. Cameron," returned the Colonel. "The Telville Daily Graphic is an advertising concern, and likes its business known."

The young artist rushed upstairs three steps at a time, and charged into the sitting-room with a flushed face and eyes alight. Cassidy had drawn down the blinds against the dismal day and had lit the gas. He stared up from his book at Jack's sparkling face, and pitching the volume to one end of the room, grasped his chum's hand.

"Jack, me boy," he cried, shaking the hand vigorously, "how are ye? I haven't seen ye for half-a-year. There's been a dull villain masquerading in your place since then, and I'm glad to see the real fellow back again."

"The real fellow's off again at once," said Cameron. He told his story, and hurried on his overcoat and gloves as he spoke. Cassidy ran downstairs with him.

"You'll be back to dinner, Jack," he said, as they entered the studio together. "We must have doch and dhorras before ye go, companion of me infancy."

"Our business, sir," said the Colonel, "will be over in an hour. If you will oblige me with your

society we will all dine together. Viaduct Hotel, six sharp."

That was arranged on the instant, and in another minute Cassidy was alone, saving time for Cameron by collecting and packing pencils, sketch-books, blocks, water-colours, and what not.

"Why wasn't it me that had the luck?" asked William sorrowfully, but he brightened again at the thought of the new brightness in the face of his friend.

"Got a passport?" inquired the Colonel, as he and Cameron emerged on the street together.

"No," said Jack pausing.

"Come along," said the Colonel. "British Consulate, Vienna. Day after to-morrow. Boat belonging to Donau Dampschiff Company sails next day. Day-and-a-half in Vienna, clear. Time enough for anything.

The Colonel moved languidly and spoke languidly. His deliberation tantalised the artist, and the warrior-journalist noted this.

"It's a valuable thing, Mr. Cameron," he said, "always to be in time and never to be in a hurry. Conserves the vital tissues. I never missed an engagement in my life, sir, and I never hurried. Except once," he added, half-a-minute later.

"And why then?" asked Cameron.

"Polar bear," replied the Colonel. "Best excuse for being in a hurry, Mr. Cameron, that I've encountered yet."

"Colonel Sprague," said the artist, suddenly.

"Adsum," responded the Colonel.

"I hope to do justice to your judgment of me, but I may fail in spite of the best intentions."

"Why, certainly," said the Colonel, "but I'm no prophet if you do. But now, Mr. Cameron, I like you, and I'll tell you something. You are engaged by the Telville Daily Graphic, and you go out to the seat of probable war at the expense of that journal. While out there you belong to that journal. You will no more expose yourself to unnecessary danger—being a man of honour—than you would expose any other property of your employers."

"Why do you think it worth while to say this to me?" asked the artist.

"Never you mind why, Mr. Cameron," replied the Colonel. "Perhaps I have noted you for a year past, and have observed a change in you. Perhaps I have so good a reason for being a single man at five-and-forty that I can make a guess at a young man's complaint—at times, when the symptoms coincide with mine. I wont ask you to forgive me, Mr. Cameron, for saying this, and I will tell you why, sir. The real and

honest sympathy of a man for a man is not a thing to apologize for."

"It's intrusion may be," said Jack, who had paused a half-minute earlier in the street, and now faced the Colonel with a look which boded ill for the conclusion of their common bargain.

"At a time like this—no, sir," returned the Colonel, with long-drawn gravity. "You may have observed, Mr. Cameron, that I am not a talkative man. I have observed that men who only speak upon necessity are very seldom liars. I ask you to believe me, sir, therefore, when I say that I have not alluded to my own case for twenty years, and that I could only have alluded to it now in the hearing of a man for whom I have learned to entertain a regard."

The middle-aged man of the world, whose sores were old, might say as much as this with no great difficulty, but the ardent youngster, whose wounds were not yet cicatrised, found it hard to listen.

"I am much obliged for your regard, Colonel Sprague," said the painter, "but I don't care to continue this conversation."

"You are right, Mr. Cameron," said the Colonel, with a solemnity which was unusual even for him. "We will turn our minds to business. I am an old campaigner, and I can give you a tip or two, sir."

He was full of sound advice drawn from experience, and his newly-engaged subordinate began to take an interest in him. The Colonel's notion of business was simplicity itself, and in less than the hour he had specified he and Cameron were ready for Cassidy. His notions of a dinner were elaborate, and admirably removed from his ideas of business.

At the appointed hour Cassidy joined them, and found Jack in wonderful spirits. The reticent Colonel blossomed into a table historian, and told yarns of the great war, and it was ten o'clock when Cameron arose and withdrew, on the plea of letters to write. Cassidy and the Colonel stayed awhile over the last bottle.

"What a night!" said the Irishman, straying to the window and drawing aside the blind. "It's snowing heavens hard. I thought of following Cameron at once, but I think I'll make myself snug at the fireside a little longer."

The Colonel was like many other habitually silent men, and having taken out his conversational stopper, was tolerably free to flow for the rest of the evening. So the two sat and smoked and talked, and in effect it was after one o'clock when Cassidy buttoned himself up, lit his companionable old briar-root pipe, and prepared to face the storm.

The snow was blown twenty ways at once, and

fell with almost blinding thickness. Cassidy rammed his ungloved hands deep into the pockets of his seedy ulster, and with his pipe making a comfortable little halo in the darkness and the snow-flakes in front of him, tramped along warm and contented. The storm had cleared the streets alike of the dangerous, the poor, and the miserable, and London was as silent as a desert. When the snow had made a wreath three inches deep about Cassidy's hat-brim, and had laid a thick white epaulette on each shoulder, it ceased, and the homeward-bound artist, glad of the change, paused for a stamp on a wind-cleared bit of pavement, and shook the gathered weight from his hat and overcoat. The railings of the British Museum courtyard stood against the dark in crooked and broken lines of white, and the massive building gloomed beyond, as Cassidy, after that momentary pause, started at an ambling trot along Museum Street. As he reached the corner a girl fluttered past him, her feet silent on the snow, and in the light of the gas-lamps he knew her for Mary Bassett. She pressed steadily and swiftly westward, and Cassidy pursued his own way in the same direction. Suddenly as she had passed him, he had seen a strange and terrible look in her face, and under any circumstances he would have been amazed to find her abroad companionless at such an hour. She was bare-headed, the coils of

her hair were thick with snow, and she wore nothing on this inclement night above the ordinary indoor dress. Cassidy's first conclusion was, that Bassett had met with some disaster, or had fallen suddenly ill, and that his daughter had run out in this ill-furnished haste to find a doctor. The red lamp of the surgeon gleamed on the street thirty yards ahead, and the girl crossed the road towards it, but passed the door and went on as fleetly as ever. This alarmed the one observer, and he quickened his pace in pursuit.

The impudent gaiety of his ordinary manner with woman was of no avail in this case, and though he had known the girl almost from her infancy, he could not summons as yet the presence of mind to accost her in these extraordinary circumstances. A hundred conjectures, hitting anything and everything but the truth, passed through his mind as he followed the the flying figure. Whilst he held on with quickened footsteps he saw that once or twice she threw her hands abroad and dropped them laxly at her side again, with the ultimate gesture of renunciation and despair, and this so moved him that he cast aside everything but his pity and concern, and he ran until he came abreast of her.

“Miss Bassett. Pardon me. What is the

matter? You are in distress. How can I help you?"

She looked at him, but never paused in her swift walk. He could not tell from her glance whether or not she recognized him.

"Miss Bassett," he began again, "this is mere midwinter madness. Ye can't be *allowed* to be out in this dress at such an hour on a night like this. What can I do for you?"

"Nothing," she answered in a breathless voice, and hurried on with Cassidy beseeching at her side.

"Now, Miss Bassett," said the Irishman at last, "I'm an ould friend o' your father's, and I've known you since ye were a child, and I'll not have it. Ye must listen to reason, and be a good girl. Now, now, now."

He passed his arm through hers, and gently brought her to a more moderate pace. She made a movement to resist him, but he held her firmly though softly.

"By what right do you stop me?" she panted, turning her white face upon him.

"I saw your mother nursing you many's the time," said Cassidy. "I knew ye when ye were barely able to walk and talk. Is this the sort of night for a maid to be out in? Or the sort of a dress for the weather? Or a time of night for you to be alone? Come, come, let me take you back to Bloomsbury Square."

"No," she cried, striving to free herself from his hold; "nobody shall force me there." He held her firmly and gently still.

"Me poor dear child, I wont force ye anywhere if I can help it. But it's out of reason that ye should go about loike this. Now what'll I do for you?" She shook her head from side to side with such a piteous gesture that his heart ached at it. "It can't be the old story here," he said to himself. "I wont believe it yet awhile any way. Will I take you home, Miss Bassett?" he asked aloud.

"No, no," she cried helplessly. "Let me go."

"Where?" he asked soothingly.

"I don't know," she answered distractedly. "Anywhere."

"Now, now," said Cassidy, with kind decision, "I wont have this, Miss Bassett. Where will I take ye to? For until I know I wont budge a foot, nor let you either. And now ye know. Where will I take ye to?" She only shook her head from side to side, and raised and dropped the one free hand again. "Have you any money?" Her gesture was sufficient answer. "Nor I neither, God be good to me. Bedad, I know what I'll do after all. If ye won't go home, Miss Bassett, will ye go to Maida Vale, to Mrs. Leverett's? Horace is a good Samaritan," he went on inwardly, "and the wife's a woman

of Samaria. And they're old friends, too, and maybe she'll open heart to the women, though she wont to me, poor thing!" He waited for her answer, but none came. "Ye'll die if ye stay in the streets," he went on. "Or else the police'll lay hands on ye. Ye wouldn't loike that, Miss Bassett. Will ye come?"

She yielded to him, and he set out with her, first pausing to divest himself of the shabby ulster, and to compel her to assume it. The snow had long since melted on her hair, and he drew the hood of the coat over her head, and stepped sturdily through the slush and snow, supporting her firmly as he went. Half-way down Oxford Street he descried a four-wheeler crawling along the road, and hailed the driver. After some chaffering, the man consented to take them, but when they were once inside the vehicle and rumbling slowly over the muffled stones, a little discomfiture touched the Irishman's heart. It *was* counting somewhat rashly on the best friend's forbearance and kindness, to propose to rouse him at such an hour in order to leave a houseless girl upon his hospitality, and "'twill be adding insult to injury," said Cassidy to himself, "to make him pay the cab-fare."

It was something of a shock to him when at last the four-wheeler, after a dreary journey, paused before the house of Mr. Leverett in

Maida Vale, to find the lower windows illuminated; and to hear the sounds of music and voices floating from the drawing-room. He had his task to go through, however, and, on reflection, this seemed to make it a little easier. Leaving Mary in the cab, he advanced to the door and knocked boldly. Leverett himself appeared in answer.

"Why, Bill, what are you doing here at this time of night?" he cried.

"Sh!" said Cassidy. "Give me a helping hand here, Horace, if ye never did in your loife before. Here's Bassett's daughter, that I found wandering in the streets half-wild with grief, poor thing. I tried to bring her home, but there she *wont* go. So I said to meself, there's Horace, the only man I know that'll do it, that has women folks about him, and I'll bring her to him. Maybe Mrs. Leverett and Matilda will find out what's the matter. She wont breathe a word to me."

"Wait a bit," said Leverett, "I'll fetch the wife."

He ran indoors and returned with Mrs. Leverett, to whom in a few whispered words he conveyed the situation.

"Dear me, Horace," said the good woman, "where is she? What can be the matter?" She ran out to the cab, and came back with

a motherly arm about the muffled figure. The girl was crying as if her heart would break.

"Horace," said Cassidy shamefacedly, "I hadn't a penny for the cab. Will ye stop it out of to-morrow's allowance?"

Leverett paid the fare and dismissed the wondering jarvey.

"Go down into the kitchen," he said to Cassidy. "There's a fire there, and I'll bring you a glass of grog after your ride. I've some people here, and I can't say anything about this matter. They're going directly."

Cassidy slipped downstairs and waited by the fire, and in half-an-hour the host came down with the promised grog, the which the guest gratefully disposed of. Whilst they were discussing the night's adventure Mrs. Leverett descended.

"Horace," she began, "never speak a word to Montgomery Bassett any more."

"What has *he* done?" asked her husband.

"Turned that poor child into the streets without so much as a hat or shawl, on this night of all others in the year. The brute!"

"What for?" cried Leverett. "I always thought him a model father."

"The poor girl refused to marry that young—What's-his-name—the millionaire, or whatever he is—*young*——"

"Weatherley?" said Cassidy.

"Weatherley," cried the motherly woman, as if the name were an offensive epithet. "And it's my belief, William, that the poor thing is breaking her heart about young Cameron. She says she never jilted him, but that he jilted her, and that she never was engaged to the other man, though her father has always pressed her."

"That's a quare story, Horace," said Cassidy. "And I know this, any way—that Jack Cameron's heart's broke with her, and I was with him, more be token, poor boy, when Bassett forbad him the house in his daughter's neem, bedad, and swore that she had thrown him over for young Weatherley. And he confessed that the girl had accepted Weatherley within an hour of the time she said 'Yes' to poor Jack. And if I'd thought of it all as I think of it now, she might have stopped in the streets for me."

"There's more in this than we know of," said Leverett oracularly.

"There's not much more in it than I know," returned Cassidy. "Didn't she send his ring back with a mocking message, and didn't I see the letter with me own oyes? I'll tell ye now," cried William, in a mighty heat, "before he gave her the ring he kissed it three times, and he said to her—'There's one for love, and one for constancy, and one for happy

fortune.' And he got the ring back the next day but one with them words with it, that was known only to their two selves. And his heart's just broke with her, that's what it is. . . . I'll take me coat back, Horace, and I'll be goin' home. Cameron's starting for Nicopolis in the morning, and I'll find him up already."

Neither of his hearers quite caught the name of the place to which Cameron was bound, but Mrs. Leverett said seriously—

"He ought to know the truth at once, William."

Cassidy shook his head stubbornly.

"I'll be as glad as anybody to find out that she's what I used to think her, but he's suffered enough already, and I wont plague him."

And so it did actually come about that Jack Cameron left England's shores behind and his true-love in distress, without knowing of her truth, near as the knowledge seemed to come to him. And the seed Montgomery Bassett had sown bore poison none the less for others because it bore poison for the planter also.

## CHAPTER IX.

"HOGAN!" cried a voice, with an unmistakable Irish accent. "Hogan, ye blackguard."

"What's the matther?" another voice demanded sleepily.

"We're falling back on Schumla, and the foe is abroad in abundance."

"Ah! go away!" returned the sleepy voice. "There's not an hour in the twenty-four when we're not falling back somewhere or 'other, an' here we are. I'm fallin' back on slumber, an' be hanged to you."

"A-ah!" cried the disturber, with a wild yell. "Who's threadin' on me?"

"That you, Leary?" said a third voice. The darkness was Egyptian.

"Here's Cameron will tell you, Hogan," said the disturber. "Aren't we fallin' back on Schumla, Cameron?"

"We're falling back for somewhere," answered Cameron, striking a lucifer match, and setting it to a candle. "Turn out, Hogan. I've just left Asif Bey, and he allows five

minutes to get the tent down. He wont keep the araba one second later."

"It's raining lions an' tigers," said the awakened dolefully. "Ye can hear it on the tent."

"Where's the horses, Cameron?" asked the other.

"All three saddled and waiting."

"Did ye cover the saddles from the rain?" demanded Doctor Hogan. "There's nothing nastier than ridin' in a wet saddle."

"Yes. Move around there. Got everything? Come along. These fellows know what to do. They'll have the tent down in a jiffy. Chabook, Mustafa!"

"I don't know what we'd do without you, Cameron," said Leary. "You're a father to us, begorra y'are!"

"They're shelling us, the dirty ruffians!" cried Hogan, disgustedly, "No comfort. No peace o' mind. No quiet. I don't mind it in the dee-toime. Fightin' comes natural then; but I can get all *I* want without gettin' up in the middle o' the noight for it."

They found their horses near at hand, and mounted. The road was a mere slough, for the retreating army had churned the soft earth into mud a foot deep.

"Leary," cried Hogan suddenly, "where's the boy?"

“What boy?”

“The little dandy that came in this morning, on the bay mare. It’s not long she’ll last, poor thing. Fancy a man bringin’ an English thoroughbred to do this sort o’ work. Hould up, ye baste! Where is he?”

“Sorra one o’ me knows,” said Leary. “He rode out of camp with his servant this afternoon—if it wasn’t yesterday. Is it to-morrow morning or to-day, boys? Who’s a watch?”

“It wants an hour to dee-breek,” said Hogan. “I can tell it by the blackness. I hope the little fellow’s safe. What’s he want, at all?”

“Says he’s here to join the Polish Legion. Got his commission from Said Pasha in Constantinople, and never smelt smoke in his life, or saw the inside of a barracks. It’s a foine body, that Polish Legion. They’re all officers. Two hundred and fifty of them, and not a private in the lot.”

“Nor a Pole, noyther,” said Hogan.

“There’s Lacy knows of him at home,” said Leary, “and says he’s a howling swell, with a princely income. If I wor a howling swell, with a princely income, d’ye think ye’d find me here, chippin’ an’ mendin’ Bazouks and Zeibecks?”

“Why, ye know ye loike it,” said the other.

“Why wouldn’t I?” demanded Leary.

"There's neither debts nor duns can reach me here, and the practice in gunshot wounds is entertaining. But there's finer diversion to be found by them that knows where to look for it, and has money. Give me young Weatherley's income, and see me volunteer into the Polish Legion."

This conversation was necessarily conducted in loud tones, and was mostly carried on across Jack Cameron's person. He started at this unexpected name.

"Where does he come from?" he asked.

"He gave me his card this afternoon," said Leary, "or yesterday, or whenever it was, as polite as ye please; but I forget where he's living. It's an Abbey, or a Grange, or something like that."

"At Oakenham?" asked Cameron.

"That's the place. D'ye know him?"

"I saw him once, and the name struck me—that's all." What could have brought young Weatherley out here? It is not usual for accepted lovers, who have plenty of money, to go campaigning as a preliminary to marriage. Jack had been long enough in the country to know how devoted to destruction that melancholy imposture called the Polish Legion was already, and had been from the first. Only the most ignorant and reckless, or those who were des-

perate of fortune, chose that form of suicide. His reflections on this topic kept him busy and silent until long after daybreak. He had learned to despise his old sweetheart, and had learned his lesson well; but she interested him yet, and he could not keep his bitter thoughts from her. A month of dreary waiting on the banks of the Danube, and a month of rough-and-tumble campaigning when the fight had once begun, had left him in that respect where he was on leaving England.

At the morning halt, he sat in a filthy Bulgarian hut, and sopped his biscuit in the inexpressible wine of the country; and whilst the two Irish doctors chattered like a pair of cheery magpies, and he looked out absently at the muddy village street and the steady down-pour, young Weatherley rode by, waterproofed from head to foot. Messrs Hogan and Leary yelled at him with invitations and welcome, and he alighted, finding his sword and his military cloak as yet a little in his way.

"Gad," said the youngster, as he entered, and stripped off the gleaming waterproof, "I'm glad to find you—upon my word I am. My fellow's a fool, by George he is, and I haven't got so much as a crust of bread or a pipe of tobacco, by Jove I haven't. Hallo!" He stared at Cameron with a face of amazement and

gathering indignation. "Excuse me, gentlemen. Is this—er—this—person a friend of yours?"

Nobody responded to this query, and the young man, with as much of a military air as he could command, resumed his waterproof cloak, and bowed to the two doctors.

"Excuse me, gentlemen. I don't associate with Mr. Cameron."

Jack followed him into the rain, leaving the two doctors staring at each other.

"A word with you, sir, if you please," he said, with his hand on Weatherley's shoulder. Now Weatherley's courage was of a somewhat hysteric type, and he had to bluster a bit to keep it going at all.

"By gad, sir," he answered, "I don't desire to know you, sir, and I will thank you not to know me, sir." He was very red in the face, and he wagged his head with a fine expression of scorn and defiance. And, having got his hand in thus far, he could not refrain from going a little farther. "I think you a very low fellow, by George, sir, and I will say to your face what I've said behind your back. You're a dam scoundrel, sir. And I'll tell you what it is, by gad: we're in a country where a man can claim the satisfaction of a gentleman, and you can have it when you like. I ain't afraid of you, if Bassett was."

"I don't want to shoot you," said Jack, "and you shan't shoot me if I can help it. You will hardly deny that I have a right to ask the reason of your conduct. Will you kindly tell me why you call me a scoundrel?"

"Because you are one," cried Weatherley. The two doctors, each with a tin pannikin in one hand, and a lump of black bread in the other, were staring out of the hut doorway at this remarkable scene.

"Come, come, sir," said Cameron sternly. "Explain yourself, if you please."

"Oh! don't you bully me, sir," replied the Polish Legionary. "I ain't afraid of you. No, by George."

"Your courage outruns your discretion, Mr. Weatherley," said Jack, looking somewhat grimly at him. "Explain yourself, if you please."

"Very well, sir," said Weatherley, who began to feel uncomfortable under the other's coolness of demeanour. "If you will have it, you shall, by Jingo. You behaved to Miss Bassett like a hound, sir, and by gad, sir, I'd tell you the truth about yourself if you were as big as Nelson's column, by George I would."

"On whose authority do you make that statement, Mr. Weatherley?"

"On the authority of the lady's father, sir," cried Weatherley, ruffling with indignation, and the sense that it was necessary to look as brave as possible.

"Not on the authority of the lady?"

"No, sir," answered the lad, forgetting himself for the moment, and speaking with more dignity than he had ever worn in his life before. "And I think it rather bad taste on your part, and rather like you altogether, sir, to bring in the lady's name at all."

"Oblige me, Mr. Weatherley," said Cameron slowly, "by giving the lie, in my name, to Mr. Bassett's statement to Mr. Bassett personally, when you see him next."

"Do you mean to tell me that you didn't throw Miss Bassett over the day after your engagement with her?" asked Weatherley.

"Is that Bassett's story?" Cameron asked in turn.

It is a recognized rule of civilised men to deal gently with the names of women in affairs of this kind, and Mary Bassett's whilom lover was a staunch supporter of that law. But there are times when a man must become a law unto himself, and the artist, in the bitter rage that stung him at the contemplation of this new injury, felt himself justified in speaking the whole truth.

"I received my dismissal at the hands of Miss Bassett, Mr. Weatherley, and was informed that I was rejected in your favour, I cannot deal with Mr. Bassett myself, but I shall request a withdrawal of the injurious words you have used concerning me, and I shall leave you to deal with your informant as your own sense dictates. He owes you something for having placed you in a position so humiliating."

Jack Cameron's manner rather staggered the youngster, but then he held too much evidence against him. Mary Bassett's illness of which he knew the cause, made the artist's story unbelievable.

"That wont do for me," said Weatherley. "Thrown over in *my* favour? Why, what the dooce do you think brings me here, by gad? You might have found a cleverer lie than that, by George you might."

This so filled Cameron with astonishment, that he had not even mental standing-room for anger.

"Miss Bassett did not accept you?"

"No, she didn't," cried young Weatherley, almost with tears in his eyes. "D'ye think I'd be here, Polish Legioning, if she had, by gad? No, sir, she broke her heart over a scoundrel, that's what she did, poor thing. I want no more to do with you, sir, if you'll

excuse me. But if you want to find me out, you can do it very easily." With this he turned to go.

"Stay," cried Jack, "I must have this out." His heart was beating like a sledge-hammer, and a thousand feelings were running riot in it. Was it likely that both he and Weatherley had been abused? That Mary, too, had been misled? That he had falsely mistrusted her?

"You can have it out when you like," said the other, misapprehending him. "Send your friend, sir, and I shall be glad to see him."

"This must be settled here, and now, if you please," answered Cameron, intercepting him. "You know Bassett's handwriting? Come with me."

Weatherley followed, and Cameron, entering the hut in which his horse was stabled, drew a little tin case from one of the holsters, and extracted from it Bassett's letters.

"Observe the date of these letters, Mr. Weatherley," he said, "and read them both." Weatherley obeyed, and looked from him, to them with a face of vacuous consternation.

"I say, look here, by gad," he stammered, at last, "I'll tell you what it is, by George. Bassett's been fishing for my money, curse him! and he's been lying to both of us, and the poor girl as well." The young fellow

broke out with a great oath, and went raging up and down the uneven mud floor of the hut. "I'll tell you what it is, Mr. Cameron," he cried, "I can't go back from this war without fighting, as a man of honour—can I now? And I never meant to go back alive at all, by gad, though I've got lots of money and all that, and everything to make a fellow comfortable. But if I do get back alive, I'll shoot that villain, if I get hanged for it. I will, by George, I will. And if you've been served out like this, Mr. Cameron, I'm very sorry for you, and I'm confounded ashamed of myself, and I beg your pardon, sir. She wouldn't have me if every hair of my head was hung with Kohinoors, and if you can make her happy, I hope you'll do it."

Therewith young Weatherley took to wiping his eyes with the sleeve of his waterproof, to the great detriment of his personal appearance.

"I hope, Mr. Cameron," he broke out by-and-bye, in a voice shaken by his emotion, "that you'll think that I behaved like a man of honour in this matter, sir. When I thought you were a scoundrel I told you so, and I would have done if you had been as big as a house, by gad, and when I saw that I'd

been wrong I apologised, didn't I, Mr. Cameron? And I hope that under the circumstances you'll excuse me stopping any longer."

"Pray stay for a moment," cried Cameron. "Let me understand. Did you make a proposal for Miss Bassett's hand at all? Forgive me if I distress you. You see how we have both been played with."

"I'll tell you all about it," said Weatherley, mastering his emotion. The story was soon told, so far as he was concerned, and by a swift comparison of experience they began to appreciate Mr. Bassett's fatherly manœuvre. "I've got one thing I ought to do," said the youngster, when this was over, "and I'll do it, if you'll have the goodness to come back to the other hut." Cameron in turn followed Weatherley, as Weatherley had followed him, and in the presence of the two doctors, who could make neither head nor tail of the whole proceeding, the Legionary withdrew his libel. "I spoke under a mistake, gentleman," he said, "and I have apologised to Mr. Cameron."

"And I," said Jack, "think that Mr. Weatherley's language was very natural, and that he had good ground for his evil opinion of me."

"'Tis a bit of a pity too," said Hogan,

with a cheerful grin. "'Twould have been good practice for Leary and meself had ye pinked each other, and we'd have seconded you like brothers. Wouldn't we, Phil?"

"Faith, we would, then," responded Phil, pegging solidly at the black bread and the unspeakable wine.

The two surgeons had all the talk to themselves, and most of the breakfast, though the others sat down with them and did their best to share it. The rain came pouring down ceaselessly, and they all marched through it until twilight fell. Cameron had plenty to think of on that memorable ride, and his thoughts were a torment to him. Would Mary ever forgive him for his want of faith in her? If he had only believed in her as he ought to have done, if he had been the downright loyal lover he had thought himself, neither she nor he would have suffered. And it is to be regretted, but not the less set down in a faithful chronicle, that under the pressure of this reflection he felt so forlorn and hopeless that within himself he decided never to go back again. She had suffered so much through his want of faith—for he knew the story of her illness now, and could guess the rest—and had so deservedly rooted him from her affections that he could never face her any more. She need never hear of him

again : never be vexed with him ; need have no knowledge of his late repentance. There are ways enough out of life in a campaign, and if he carried his life all through it after all, why, that was a misfortune to be borne. Perhaps these wicked thoughts may be forgiven to a lad so heartsore. They are set down here in candour for the best construction of the charitable.

That foolish Polish Legion never had a chance, as all the world knows. Sobieski, who should have headed it, was eating his heart in the capital, and all the cut-throats of various nationalities, and all the fiery sympathisers with the Turk, and all the heart-broken young lovers, and all the defaulting cashiers from Cornhill to Cairo who made up that curious contingent, were scattered and divided. Some joined various regiments of Circassians, and others the native Suwarree ranks, and others went home, and many, like young Weatherley, simply doffed the uniform and stayed to see the fun. One or two blossomed into Special Correspondents, and being actually on the ground, had no difficulty in finding work.

Jack and Weatherley stuck together and made friends, and the summer found them both in Shipka Keui, whilst the long-drawn battle of the Pass went on in the hills above them. The artist was popular, quiet as he was, but he

had no concern with the roaring fun which went on at times among the non-combatants, who lightened labour and danger by many genial devices. He kept lonely for the most part, sketching, or writing, or hammering at his Turkish grammar; and it came to pass one morning, as he sat at work, that he bethought himself of Bassett's return of the ring, and an idea suddenly occurring to him in respect of it, he drew it at once from his purse and looked at it carefully for the first time. Before he had given the sacred symbol to Mary he had scratched his own initials within it. The lines, as he remembered well enough, had been delicately traced with an etching needle. It had never seemed worth while to look for them until now. And now he could find no sign of them, and for the first time the full extent of Bassett's villainy broke in upon him. But he could find no excuse for his own faith in the deceit, though he saw at last the diabolical cunning of it all. It was bitter and enraging to know that a mere glance at this instrument of mischief might have saved him from misbelief, and spared Mary a heartbreak also.

In telling a story like this it is best to tell the whole truth as far as it can be known. When Jack Cameron slipped that ring back into his purse, picked up his sketch-book, lit

his pipe, and set out for the fortifications in the Pass, he had made up his mind not to come down again alive if he could help it. It mattered to nobody whether he died or lived; so he told himself. And if he fell with a Russian bullet through him in the execution of his duty, that was the look-out of Chance, or Providence, or whatever guided the concerns of this dirty world. So, nursing these desperate and wicked thoughts, the sore-hearted lad walked out of the village and sauntered up the winding hillside path. The sun was shining gaily, and the only clouds in the sky were born of gunpowder, but they floated as fleecy and as whitely innocent as the children of the dew on peaceful fields. The big guns were banging away, as they did for three or four days in every week, and the shells shrieked like demons as they swept through the air. Behind their earthworks the cheerful little artillerymen in their tattered trousers and faded coats and tarbooshes grinned amiably at the Inglesa Effendi as he went by, and gave him a friendly "Oorallah." It might have been a general play-time, in spite of earthworks and guns and the store of shells. Nobody had been hit to-day, the shells howled harmlessly, and the men were used to the infernal noise they made, and took no notice of it. With

everybody so cheerful and gay, and the sun bright overhead, the whole scene looked more like a noisy demonstration of peace than a sketch out of war's great panorama.

Suddenly one of the messengers from the Russian guns swished with its own wild yell through an embrasure, mowed down a gunner at his gun, and smashed upon the rocky wall behind. Half-a-dozen poor fellows gone to their account and two more writhing wounded on the ground, and all sense of play knocked out of fancy, and ugly fact back again! And then a hurried deportation of the dead, a slower and more careful carriage of the wounded, a little loose earth sprinkled about the place where they had fallen, and lo! in five minutes gaiety and cheerfulness again, and a semblance of noisy sport about the scene.

At the northern end of the earthwork (which fronted almost due west) the Russian fire had yesterday disabled a couple of guns, and blown and beaten into a mere pile of earth a dozen yards of fortification. Towards this spot at an easy pace walked the misguided Cameron with his camp-stool under his arm, and marching through the breach sat himself down on the open hillside beyond, and leisurely sharpening a pencil surveyed the rugged earth and the dismantled guns. His back was turned to the

Russian forts, and hoping with all his heart that he might be hit and his troubles ended, he began to sketch. When they found him there afterwards, so the poor desperate fool thought, it would not do to have any imperfect drawing in his hands. He was resolute to do nothing that looked like haste, nothing that should leave a hint behind that he had any knowledge of the danger in which he sat. There was no disturbance in his nerves, and he worked away calmly. The swish of a bullet, which flattened on the rock a score yards in front of him, pleased him: they had found him out already. Another sang closer, striking one of the prostrate field-pieces before him, and the great tube gave forth a sound like an anvil struck by a light hammer, the tone lingering in the air for half-a-minute. There was no fear in his mind, but there began now a quickening of the pulses, and a sense of exultation dawned in his heart; when suddenly, round one of the jagged edges of the earthy wall in front peered the face of young Weatherley.

"I say, Cameron," said the unsuspecting youth, "ain't that rather a warm corner, now?"

Cameron went on with his sketch without a word, and the youngster arguing from his silence and his unmoved presence there that the spot

was somehow protected, walked tranquilly over the broken earth and came towards him.

"Go back," cried the artist, rising suddenly and waving his hands against him, "go back."

"By gad," cried Weatherley, shrinking but not retiring, "the place is all exposed. Come in, Cameron."

Cameron felt that it was mere murder to leave Weatherley there exposed to the fire which he himself had wantonly drawn.

"Go back," he cried again, making a snatch at his camp-stool as if to follow. But at that moment he dropped, and a whole storm of bullets hissed and sang about the breach. Young Weatherley with a cry dashed forward, seized him, and dragged him over the mound. Cameron was helpless and deadly white, and his rescuer felt him hastily over, but could discover nothing.

"Man hit?" said a slow nasal voice behind. "If you're not a doctor, sir, I may be of service. Allow me." A tall, solemn man knelt down by the wounded figure, and after a brief examination drew a penknife from his pocket and deftly cut away the heavy riding-boot and the trouser tucked within it. "Handkerchief, sir," said the solemn man. "Thank you. Broken, but not smashed, I think. Do you know my friend, Mr. Cameron?"

"Are you a doctor?" asked young Wea-

therley, all abroad. He had fetched his man from under fire like a lion, but he felt sick after it. "Will he die?"

"Hope not," said the solemn man. "Can you lend a hand?"

Young Weatherley, with a grey mist about him, lent a hand, and gradually grew better. The Russians were replying pretty hotly to the Turkish fire just then, and all the little fellows in the tattered blue coats and faded scarlet tarbooshes were serious on a sudden, and working like horses. Nobody took much notice of the two men with their burden, and they had a weary way to go under the hot sun to the village.

Hogan espying them from a distance, caught up a case of instruments and ran after them. Before Cameron was fairly borne indoors he was up with them, and a minute later he was examining the wound.

"Ye're all right this time, Cameron," he said. "Ye'd like that for a trophy, most likely," as his lance made the patient wince, and he laid the bullet on the table beside him. Cameron opened his eyes, looked about him, and then swooned again.

"My card, sir," said the solemn stranger to young Weatherley half-an-hour later. "Colonel Savage D. Sprague. I am one of the pro-

prietors of the journal Mr. Cameron represented. I was in this country on purpose to meet him. May I ask, sir, if you were a witness to the catastrophe?"

Young Weatherley told the story as it had happened, and Colonel Sprague shook hands with him. Weatherley had one card left in his case, and he handed that to the Colonel.

"Do you think he'll do all right, Hogan?" asked the youngster tremulously, as the gaunt Colonel took the card from his fingers. "I wouldn't miss him for the world; by gad, I wouldn't."

"We'll save the leg and him with it, I hope," said Hogan.

"I believe he wanted to get hit, by gad I do!" said Weatherley, passing his hand across his eyes. "He's been dam miserable about —something or other."

"Hould your tongue," said Hogan not unkindly. "There's not been many campaigns without that sort of thing in them."

"Mr. Weatherley," said the Colonel, "you are in error, sir. Mr. Cameron, as the representative of the Telville Daily Graphic, would lend his best energies to the service of that journal, and would not by any wanton act of his permit it to be distanced by its contemporaries."

## CHAPTER X.

BEFORE morning dawned, Mr. Montgomery Bassett had contrived, curious as it may seem, to discover that he had been shamefully treated by his only child. As a matter of fact he had never meant to turn her out of doors. It was preposterous to think of. He had meant merely that she should consent to marry young Weatherley, and the girl had chosen to exile herself rather than submit to him. Mr. Bassett felt naturally enough that his position was a hard one, and he began to think with terror (and resentment arranged beforehand) of the reception the story would meet at the public hands if it should reach so far. He appealed to his own past life—his fourteen years of widowerhood—his constant tenderness and kindness to his daughter—and whilst a very halo began to grow about his own head, the girl's face began to be obscured by a mask of black ingratitude. The fact that he had been a rascal told in his favour. He had crossed all his own kindly instincts, and his own lofty honour had

been soiled in order that she might have a chance to marry prosperously. He had become a sort of moral martyr for her sake, and his own crucified truth and honour cried out against the ingratitude which refused to accept their voluntary sacrifice. To make a bargain with the devil, according to all legends known, is to secure the most exact and scrupulous attention to business. You sell your soul undoubtedly, but you do get your price for it, and so far the arrangement is satisfactory. But to make a direct and specific agreement, to sell, say, one-half your soul, for an object precisely specified and, having paid down your price, to be choused, is offensive to the understanding and enraging to the heart.

All the time Mr. Bassett was unpleasantly frightened at the thing he had done, and was prepared to find a cruel and base construction put upon it. His daughter had chosen to leave his house on a wretched winter night, and to walk in the stormy streets unfriended, and, considering the weather, half-clad. And now it would be said that he had turned her out; as if it were his fault she had chosen the wrong end of the alternative! You see at once how necessary it was for him to get into a mental attitude in which he could repel the assaults which were certain to be made against him. A

good general in expectation of an attack will throw up earthworks, or in default of them will fight behind a few mealy bags rather than have no cover. A poor excuse is always better than none, but never so much better as when your conscience is disposed to take a bullying tone with you.

The eminent tragedian having routed his remorse thus, and entrenched himself behind the earthworks of a sound egotism, was still far from being at ease. The physical discomforts which followed on a night distinguished by heavy potations and an unbroken watch was in themselves considerable, and there were fears in his mind too awful to have open expression given to them. So long as these were bearable he endured them, but when the whole morning had dragged itself out and the afternoon came, bringing no news of Mary, his terrors gave him courage to apply for information to the police. He went hastily, with a disordered face and gait, to the nearest station, and there made his statement.

His daughter, aged twenty, had left her home last night, attired in such and such a fashion. She had immediately been pursued, but had not been heard of or seen.

"You are Mr. Montgomery Bassett," asked the official whom he consulted, "of such and such a number in Bloomsbury Square?"

"Yes," said Mr. Bassett.

"Information was given last night by the landlord of the house," said the official, "that the young lady was turned into the street by her father."

"Great Heaven!" cried the great tragedian with a voice and face of horrified astonishment. It was true, he admitted (when he had somewhat recovered from the shock of this libellous statement), that the misguided girl had left the house in consequence of a dispute which had occurred between them. But turned into the street? And by him—her father? The distressed parent hid his eyes behind a spotless handkerchief, and groaned so movingly that even the official heart experienced a pang. In his private capacity the official was an admirer of Mr. Montgomery Bassett's style, and the private tragedy of a professed tragedian was naturally interesting.

"Shall you advertise for the young lady, sir?" asked the officer.

"Except in an extreme contingency," said Mr. Bassett, "no."

"I suppose," said the officer with a dreamy air of self-communion, "that the nearest bit of water would be Regent's Park way. Yes."

"Don't hint at that!" cried the tragedian. That was too horrible; and yet, what had a

million women done before under provocation no more terrible? For one minute the defences were down, and the foe streamed in like a tide. He left the place feeling like a murderer.

Before he reached home again, Hope and Egotism joining their forces had ousted conscience, and his wicked soul cowered behind its breastwork, awaiting a new attack. It came, but came in a form which Conscience—if not he—could combat.

"A gentleman to see you, sir," said the maid, appearing before him as he entered. The girl knew the story of the previous night, and was almost afraid to approach him.

"I can see nobody," returned the actor. "I am not at home to anybody."

"You will see me, Bassett, if you please," said a man's voice, and Mr. Horace Leverett appeared in the doorway of the first-floor sitting-room.

"Leverett," said Mr. Bassett, covering his eyes with his handkerchief and extending his right hand, "excuse me. I can see nobody to-day."

"I am here," said Leverett, disregarding his proffered hand, "with a message from your daughter."

"My daughter!" cried the great tragedian wildly. "My child!"

"Is the poor young lady safe, sir?" cried the maid.

"Quite safe," said the scene-painter.

"Where is she, Leverett?" demanded Mr. Bassett, rushing into the hall. "My poor misguided child!"

"Now Bassett," said the scenic artist, squaring his broad shoulders at him, "if you take this tone with me, and give me any of your stage airs after last night's work, I'll punch your head. I haven't punched a man's head," he added, with a sort of relish for the phrase, "for over twenty years, but I'll keep my word with you. You can go, my dear," he continued, addressing the maid with sudden suavity of voice and manner. "And you come in here with me, Bassett, if you please, and we'll have this little matter out together."

Mr. Bassett, with more meekness than might have been expected of him, complied with his guest's invitation. To his surprise and somewhat to his consternation, the guest turned the key in the lock, withdrew it, and put it in his pocket.

"Now I'll talk to you," said Mr. Leverett, shaking his head at him in a stern and menacing fashion. "You thundering old scoundrel!"

"How—how dare you, sir?" cried Bassett.

"Dare?" cried Leverett, squaring his shoulders and shaking his head again. "I don't dare anything in talking to you. I'm not a woman. You won't abuse me. No, sir. You know better."

The broad shouldered scenic artist actually

pranced, he squared himself to such an extent at Bassett. He laughed also, not by any means in a forced or unnatural way, but with a hearty scorn which really did seem to find amusement in its certainty of Bassett's cowardice. And to tell the truth, the tragedian looked as if he were prepared to justify his guest's opinion of him. His pale lips moved uneasily, and his eyes were shift-y. But the smallest dog will growl when you take his bone away, and the meanest of human creatures resents the theft of his last rag of dignity.

"I demand," said Mr. Bassett shakily, "that you adopt a different manner with me, sir."

"If my manner doesn't suit you," responded Leverett, "I'm naturally very sorry, but I can't alter it. I'm here with a proposal and an alternative. When you turned your daughter out of house and home last night—"

"I turned my daughter out of house and home?" cried Bassett.

"Upon my word," said Leverett, "I almost believe that you believe you didn't. Silence! When you turned your daughter out of house and home last night, she might have perished in the streets, and would have done so, probably enough, if she had not been recognized by a friend who brought her for shelter to my house at Maida vale. Now, don't you say anything,

because I've got your daughter's word beforehand, and I'd believe it against a million of you. Six months ago and more you told your daughter a lie which broke her heart, and told her sweetheart a lie which broke *his* heart. Now, I'm not a champion of the world at large, but I'm going to take this upon my shoulders. Act fairly by your little girl, Bassett, or I'll whip you out of every society in London."

"You will?" asked Mr. Bassett, trying to look scornful, with but indifferent success. "And how, may I ask?"

"You know as well as I do," said the unwelcome guest, shaking a threatening finger at him, "that I've only got to tell this story down the Strand to make it impossible for you to put your head within the doors of any club in London."

"My daughter is at liberty to return here," said Mr. Bassett. "She is welcome to the house she left of her own free will."

Leverett laid his hand upon the bell and rang a tremendous peal. The maid was engaged somewhere, and the mistress answered. At her knock, the scene-painter unlocked the door.

"Pray come in, ma'am," said he with a flourish of politeness. "Can you tell me, madam, anything of the manner in which Miss Bassett left your house last night?"

"Well, sir," said the landlady, with an uncertain look at the tragedian, "Mr. Bassett has been in the 'ouse, sir, a many years, and I've never had anything to say again him until now. I believe, sir, that he were to some extent in liquor. But I don't know, sir," said the landlady, coming to a sudden stop, "what right you've got to ask me, sir."

"Miss Bassett took refuge in my house, madam," said Leverett. "Mr. Bassett declares that she left home of her own free will."

"She did," cried Bassett.

"Oh, Mr. Bassett, sir, how can you?" The landlady turned formidable on a sudden. "I saw the poor dear young thing cast out into the street, sir," she cried to Leverett. "And Lovejoy, my husband, sir, runs after her as fast as he could go, but she'd got a minute start of him, and the snow was drifting so you couldn't scarcely see a yard, and I suppose he took the wrong road, sir, and she disappeared. But, leave of her own free will, poor dear? You drove her from the door," cried the landlady, turning on Bassett with a screaming voice, "you know you did. You drove her from the door."

"Thank you very much indeed, ma'am," said Leverett suavely. "Shall I have the

pleasure of carrying your best wishes to Miss Bassett? Thank you. And will you oblige me, ma'am, by ordering one of your servants to pack up Miss Bassett's things? The young lady will stay with my wife and daughter, who are old friends of hers. Thank you. Good afternoon, ma'am, though I trust to have the pleasure of seeing you again before I go."

During this speech of Leverett's he and the landlady were moving to and fro in a sort of wandering dance, she being animated by a desire to get at Bassett with a view to the delivery of her mind, and Leverett politely bent on seeing her out of the room without an unnecessary scene.

"Thank you, ma'am, extremely. *Good afternoon.* For the present only." In some mysterious way the landlady's dance, directed by Leverett, had led her from the room. The door was locked again, and the key was once more in the visitor's pocket. "Now, you low blackguard," said Leverett, turning on Bassett with quite a rollicking air of denunciation, "what have you to say?"

"By what right," asked Bassett, with his face a chalky grey, and all his features twitching, "by what right do you pretend to assume the guardianship of my daughter?"

"Now, you mustn't," said the scenic artist, shaking his head threateningly, "you really mustn't take that tone with me. You criminal dog!" He shook a heavy-looking fist with unpleasant emphasis directly under Mr. Bassett's nose, and regarded his old acquaintance with great sternness for a minute. In face of this expressive pantomime Mr. Bassett gradually retired until he reached a sofa, and being taken by it at the back of the knees, he sat down unexpectedly. "And now," said Leverett, "we'll go to business, if you please. You are prosperous, and you can afford to make your daughter a liberal allowance. After what has happened you can't expect her to surrender herself to your care again."

Leverett having taken a seat at a little distance from him, the tragedian felt less perturbed, and was able to make a faint show of resistance.

"This is all very well, dear boy, no doubt," he began. "But I do not recognize your right to come here and hector me as to what I shall or shall not do with my own affairs." Leverett made a movement in his chair, and Mr. Bassett added hastily, with a deprecatory hand outstretched towards him, "I am willing to make fitting provision for her. I have been a good and tender father to her for

twenty years. Until this most unhappy dispute" (his handkerchief came out again) "arose between us I never crossed her will in anything. And here I intervened" (he removed the handkerchief) "only to prevent her from attaching herself to a profligate with whom she would have been wretched."

"Meaning Jack Cameron?" asked Leverett. "Now I know them both, Bassett, and that sort of talk wont do with me. Jack's worth a hundred of the fellow you wanted, and you wanted *him* simply and purely because he was a man with money, and might have made things nice for you."

"I acted for the best," said Mr. Bassett, resorting to the handkerchief again. "And if last night I somewhat overstepped the bounds of parental authority, and perhaps I did, it was intended for the girl's good, and I never meant her to take me at my word."

"I believe that," said Leverett, nodding at him. "You'd bully up to the last point where you dared, I know." The visitor seemed to have an amazingly poor opinion of his host. "But now we'll go to business. Your daughter wont come back to you again. In the course of a year or two she may learn to bear the sight of you if you behave yourself,

for blood's thicker than water, when all's said and done. But at present she can't come back again, and she wont. Now the landlady will have her things ready by-and-bye, and I shall take a four-wheeler and carry them home, and you'll make her a decent allowance. How much?"

Mr. Bassett could not say. He was not himself. He desired to be liberal. He would look to his affairs and let Leverett know by an early post—probably to-morrow. He begged an old friend's kindest construction for a thoughtless speech on the part of an angry father, too seriously interpreted by a wilful child. He sent the kindest messages to his daughter, and accompanied them by a request for her forgiveness.

"Now look here, Bassett," said Leverett finally. "If you break your promise by a letter I'll post you in every theatrical club in London. Behave yourself, and we'll try to keep things quiet."

"I will do everything," said Bassett, rising with a vacant look and stretching out his hands as if things were not clear to him. "But I have been up all night in great agitation, dear boy, and I can't think now, and—and—I feel a very extraordinary sense of faintness. Horace, dear boy, the whiskey's

in the cupboard." He sank back upon the sofa, breathing heavily.

"Now by the living jingo," cried Leverett, "I'll cane the life out of you. You amazing humbug."

But Mr. Bassett's faintness turning out to be a real thing, in spite of the theatrical tricks by which it was accompanied, his guest helped him to a glass of whiskey and water, and saw him gradually revive. The fact was that the great tragedian after thirty years' practice was helpless to avoid the mannerisms of his profession, and it is probable that when he dies he will have a half-consciousness at least of doing it in a becoming attitude.

"Leverett," he said faintly, "I can't play to-night, dear boy. Ring the bell. I must have a doctor, and send round a certificate. I will do whatever you think best, dear boy, but I can't think about it now."

"Well I can see that you're seedy, Bassett," said the pitiless Leverett, "and so you deserve to be after what you've done. I wish I could think it was your conscience at work, that's all."

In the course of a half-hour or so Mr. Leverett departed triumphant with a cab-load of luggage, and in due time arrived at Maida Vale with it, to the great astonishment of the

household, who had been kept in ignorance of his intent.

Mr. Montgomery Bassett kept his promise, and a liberal share of his weekly income was set apart for his daughter's use. Leverett in return kept *his* promise, and for awhile the theatrical world heard nothing of the great tragedian's misbehaviour. But Mary Bassett, though as little of a gossip as ever lived, had in the agitation of their first meeting revealed enough to make Matilda Leverett wish for more. What Matilda knew Mr. Cassidy knew, and William was so instant and earnest in his proclamation of Jack's faith that Matilda could do no less than carry his reports to Mary. In this wise the full sum of Montgomery Bassett's doings became known to his daughter, and nothing on earth could stop Cassidy's tongue. The committee of the Cannibals requested Mr. Bassett to remove his name from the club books, and the committee of the Footlights followed suit.

All this brought about, or helped to bring about, mournful results for Mr. Montgomery Bassett. Men who had been jealous of him—and the world behind the footlights is no freer of jealousy than the world of music, or journalism, or painting, or authorship—were

glad of a chance to snub him and show him a cold shoulder. He dropped perforce out of his old way of hobnobbing with the critics, and out of sight was out of mind. In these circumstances, it seemed natural to have more frequent recourse than ever to Scotch whiskey, and the whisper got abroad that Bassett was on the downward road. Then his London engagement coming to a close, his name advertised week by week in the *Era*, seemed to attract less attention than of old, and so he actually got upon the downward road, and being on it, shot like a toboggan, till, while the guns at Shipka bellowed at each other across the ravine, and Jack Cameron lay in a little cottage on the edge of the forest of plum-trees, Mr. Montgomery Bassett, the admired tragedian, was living a shiftless life in obscure lodgings, and passing with lingering step and hungry eyes the stage doors he had entered six months earlier like a king.

## CHAPTER XI.

ON the morning of Cameron's disaster Colonel Savage D. Sprague despatched two telegrams, one being as long as he could possibly make it, and the other as short as he could possibly make it. The long telegram was addressed to the Telville Daily Graphic, and the short one to William Cassidy. The first set out in vivid and striking narrative the disaster which had befallen the valued artist-correspondent of the Graphic, and the second demanded Mr. William Cassidy's instant acceptance or refusal of the post vacated by Cameron's disablement. Colonel Sprague, being now liberated from other European engagements, was himself upon the spot to superintend the verbal horrors and splendours, and Cassidy had been growling in his hearing for five months past about not having had a chance to see a campaign. The Colonel knew no other man so likely to suit him, and since action had to be prompt he despatched his message without losing a moment.

Upon receipt thereof Mr. Cassidy, who was sitting disconsolate before a blank canvas, and cudgelling his brains for an oydaya, leapt for sudden joy, and betook himself to the performance of energetic juggling tricks with the water bottle. "Wire," so ran the message, "acceptance or rejection of post as artist at seat of war for Telville Graphic. If acceptance, draw at London bureau and start immediately. Cameron disabled." The first hurried glance at the telegram had revealed its main purport, and had thrown Cassidy into the seventh heaven. A second look showed the ominous last words, and they brought him down again. Their vagueness gave them terrors for the Irishman's friendly heart; and he started for Maida Vale with his original exultation altogether chilled. He must see Horace and Matilda before he could accept the Colonel's offer.

Now Mr. Montgomery Bassett's weekly allowance to his daughter had ceased more than a month before this date, and by this time Mr. Bassett was beginning himself to be sorely in need of an allowance, and his whereabouts was unknown to Mary and to Leverett. But whilst it lasted his weekly payment had been generous enough to allow the girl to live on less than half of it, and she was

still provided for, though the future began to look a little blank and discouraging. She lived on with the Leveretts, without adding greatly to the expenses of that easy-going household, and Leverett of an evening would declare to Mrs. Leverett, when his moderate evening glass had warmed his heart, that he was not the man to want to make money out of an orphan, and that so long as Mary paid him what she cost him he was happy. Perhaps, he would add, he might contrive to bear up even a little longer, and, indeed, the good fellow would never have taken a penny but for the satisfaction of the girl's own honourable pride.

Mary and Matilda were seated together when Cassidy broke in upon them.

"Matilda," he said lugubriously, "I've the foinest chance of meekin' money y' ever heard of in your loife, and I hope ye wont stand in betune me and good fortune."

"William," returned Matilda, "you know I shouldn't dream of such a thing."

"Very well, then," said William "I'm off to-night for the Turkish campaign."

"No, no, no, William," cried Miss Leverett, wildly rising and embracing him.

"Now there y' are," said Cassidy, "ye wont stand in betune us, and ye will stand in

betune us. Ye wouldn't dream of it in one breath and ye do it in the next. Now Matilda, darlin', listen to reason. I'll be coming home in no time with a thousand pounds in me pocket."

Enter Leverett in paint-spotted velveteen.

"What brings you here at this time of day? Eh? With a light like this, you ought to be at work, Bill." Cassidy explained. "That's a different matter. Of course you'll go. Nonsense, Matilda. Of course he'll go. Who's it for, Bill?"

"It's the Telville Daily Graphic," said Cassidy.

"Do they want two men? I suppose you'll be going into Asia?"

"I don't know," said Cassidy. "There's the telegram."

"Ah," said Leverett, taking the paper and reading mumblingly: "Wire acceptance or rejection—artist—seat of war—Telville Graphic. Draw — London Bureau — start immediately. Cameron—"

Cassidy quietly took away the paper, and the two men looked at each other for a mere instant.

"May I see the telegram, Mr. Cassidy?" asked Mary, rising and advancing.

"Well—ye see—Miss Bassett," he began

stammeringly. She took it from his unresisting hand and read it and returned it. Her face, always too pallid in these melancholy days, grew paler still, but she walked from the room quietly and with self-possession.

"I hope there's nothing serious," said Leverett.

"There's no knowing," answered Cassidy. "He may be down with a bit of fever or dysentery, or he may have been thrown from his horse, or have done nothing worse than sprain his wrist. He couldn't draw with a sprained wrist. Or he may be badly hurt, though we'll try to hope not."

"Hush!" said Leverett, and at that instant Mary returned.

"Mr. Cassidy," she began, "Will you despatch a telegram to your friend Colonel Sprague, and ask the extent of the injury?" She held out her purse to him.

"No," said Cassidy, putting her hand aside. "I won't want that, but I'll wire, and I'll have the answer sent here because I'll be starting to-night. It's good-bye, Matilda, me darlin', but only for a little while."

Miss Leverett, with the cheering assurance that he was going to certain death, bade him farewell, and retired to her own chamber to prepare for widowhood. Leverett walked out with him.

"I hope there's nothing serious about Cameron, Bill. If you find him well enough to listen to you when you get there, you must clear his mind of all this nonsense about Miss Bassett. She's a good girl, Bill, and my women-folk are wild to see her reconciled to Jack. It's odd that he never answered your letter.

"Maybe he never got it," said Cassidy. "We've written to each other pretty regularly, but I've had never a word about that first letter. Ye'll see easily enough that I didn't care to go at him again."

"You told him the whole story?"

"I told him that Bassett had swindled both him and the girl; that young Weatherley had popped the question, and had 'No' for an answer; that Miss Bassett was turned out of doors by her dear ould father, and was living with Mrs. Leverett, and the sooner he wrote to her he'd be mending her heart and his own. 'Twas a month after that before I heard from him, and then he gave me a full and particular history of all his doings, but nothing about my letter. So I left him alone."

This letter, as it turned out afterwards, lay in one of Mr. Hogan's saddle-bags. It was exhumed at the close of the campaign, and

delivered, with apologies for delay, on the anniversary of the day on which it had received the London post-mark.

Mr. Cassidy, being provided with funds, set out for the scene of war, and next day a telegram from Colonel Sprague reached Mary Bassett. "Cameron's wound not likely to be fatal," ran the message; and, as may be fancied readily enough, this curt statement of the case left room for many anxieties. Cassidy had promised to wire immediately on his arrival; and nine days after his departure came the news—"Mending slowly." A week later came another missive—"Still mending," and, on the heels of this, an actual arrival from the seat of war, in the person of young Weatherley.

Now, this young person being by nature of a soft and impressionable temperament, and being moreover a little hysterical in all his doings and his ways of thinking, had taken a prodigious liking for Jack Cameron, and was disposed to martyr himself in atonement for the wrong he had once helped to do him. He confessed, with many self-upbraidings, that if he had not dishonourably planned to throw Cameron out of the saddle, Bassett would never have been tempted, his villainous deceit on Jack Cameron and Mary would never have been practised, Mary's peace would never have been ship-

wrecked, and her accepted lover would never have cast himself voluntarily into the way of Russian bullets. The whole blame of this tragic business being thus brought home to him by the voice of accusing conscience, he was for awhile extremely miserable and dejected, but quite suddenly he brightened, and having wired for great store of delicacies for Cameron from the capital, and awaited their arrival, he betook himself at once to London by the shortest route, and arrived, so to speak, breathless.

The Leveretts and their guest were gathered round Cassidy's last message when Mr. Weatherley sent in his card. Now, nobody knew, or had any reason to know, where the young man had been this last six months, and nobody particularly cared to see him.

"Tell him, 'not at home,'" said Leverett, throwing down the card.

"I beg your parding, sir," returned the maid, "but I've told the gentleman a'ready as you was."

"Show him into the downstairs room, then," said the master of the house.

"Don't let the young man come up here," Mrs. Leverett besought him, at the head of the stairs.

"Not I," said Horace emphatically. "Leave him to me; I'll sort him."

Mr. Weatherley, having paused nowhere to change his dress, presented rather a singular appearance for London. He was habited in a tourist coat with many folds at the chest and a strap about the waist, and he wore cord breeches, and boots to the knee.

“Mr. Leverett, I believe?” he began breathlessly, and receiving a nod in answer, went on: “I’ve just run over from the Shipka Pass, Mr. Leverett.” He looked so pantingly at haste that he might have meant this statement to be literally received. “I met Mr. Cassidy, who is, I believe, a friend of yours, in Constantinople. I explained my wish to him, and he thought you might accede to it. Poor Cameron’s getting better, I’m glad to say, and—”

“You have seen Cameron?” asked Leverett. The young man, so far, did not seem to be here with any fresh intent upon Miss Bassett’s affections. “Take a seat.”

“I saw him shot,” said Weatherley. Leverett’s glance was invitation enough to carry him on with his story. “He got thirty or forty yards in front of the Turkish lines, clean under Russian fire, and there he sat sketching—by gad he did, sir—as cool as you please, and a bullet hit him in the leg. I thought he was killed at first, and I should think there must

have been a hundred of 'em pottin' at him; but when I—"

The youth paused suddenly, and blushed. Leverett eyed him with a new expression, and he was much discomfited.

"Did *you* fetch him from under fire?" asked the scenic artist.

"Well, as a matter of fact," said young Weatherley, blushing more than ever, "I didn't think of it till afterwards."

"Didn't think of what till afterwards?" asked Leverett.

"Well, you see, Mr. Leverett," said young Weatherley, with a self-exculpatory sort of air, "if you're a bit excited, don't you know, and you see a fellow down, by George, and if he happens to be a fellow that you've a regard for, by gad, you get a bit hot, don't you know, and you don't—"

"Don't what?"

"Well, you don't care at the time, you know."

"Was it you who fetched Cameron from under the Russian fire?" demanded Leverett severely.

"Well," said Weatherley defensively, "I didn't think about the Russian fire—at the time."

Leverett solemnly shook hands with him.

"Not that I'm going to stand any nonsense, now," he said, "or that I mayn't find a crow to pluck with you in a minute. Go on, if you please."

As a matter of fact young Weatherley was more ashamed to find this achievement brought home to him, than he was of having to confess his own share of meanness in Bassett's shameful story.

"Well, he wasn't dead after all, and we got him into the village, and the doctors think he'll do very nicely, and they think they'll be able to save his leg. But that isn't what I came to speak about, though I'm very glad to bring good news. What I wanted to say was——Mr. Cassidy tells me that you know everything about the matter, and——Look here, Mr. Leverett. I've acted very badly, and I want to make up for it. I dare say you know that I spoke to Bassett—though it isn't easy to talk about these things to a stranger."

"Take your own time, Mr. Weatherley," said Leverett. "Get it straight in your own mind first. That's the best way."

"Thank you," said Weatherley. "The fact is, I spoke to Bassett when I knew that Miss Bassett and Cameron were engaged. Or at least I didn't know it at the time, but I found it out five minutes later, and I asked Bassett

to use his influence, and that was dishonourable, wasn't it, Mr. Leverett?"

"To use his influence in your behalf?"

"Exactly," said Weatherley, with an exceedingly broken and fatuous air. "To use his influence in my behalf. Well, he promised; but I didn't know what a scoundrel he was, or I wouldn't have been a party to it—no, on my word of honour, by gad, I wouldn't, Mr. Leverett. Well, he told me that Cameron had behaved shamefully to Miss Bassett, and had engaged himself to a rich woman in Southampton, and he told Miss Bassett the same thing, and he told Cameron that Miss Bassett had accepted me. And now Mr. Cassidy told me in Constantinople that when Miss Bassett refused me, Bassett turned her out of doors, and she came to live with you. And——"

"Well," said Leverett. Except that in a general way young Weatherley was repentant, there was no clue to his present intentions.

"Well, of course it's no business of mine—at least, I mean I've got no right, don't you know, but——"

"Iron the creases out in your mind first, Mr. Weatherley," said the artist.

Weatherley tried back.

"I'm very sorry for the trouble I've caused, and I want to put an end to it, and when I

made up my mind to run over from the Shipka Pass I thought I'd write to Miss Bassett, but since I've seen Mr. Cassidy I thought that I'd better come to you. Cassidy says that Mrs. Leverett is an awfully nice woman, and all that sort of thing——”

“Iron it out, young man,” said Mr. Leverett, almost severely. “Iron it out.”

Weatherley tried back again.

“Cameron's just as fond of Miss Bassett as ever he was,” he said, with a terribly hang-dog look. “And Mr. Cassidy says you're an awfully good sort, and I don't mind telling you that I believe—only don't let it go any further, and Cassidy said I could trust you—I believe Cameron got hit on purpose, by gad, I do, because he was that broken-hearted, by George, he was, and fit to do anything. And I thought I'd come and tell you straight, and if Miss Bassett's in the same mind as she used to be, why, the best thing she can do will be to go over, by George, and nurse him, and take a lady to look after her and do the regular thing, and — and — and all that,” concluded young Weatherley, somewhat lamely.

“And what do you propose, Mr. Weatherley?” asked Leverett.

“Well, when I left,” said the youngster, with his eyes fixed on the carpet, “they thought

they might move him in a fortnight down to Philippopolis, where he could get more rest and more luxuries and all that. And I thought, since I saw Mr. Cassidy and he told me what an awfully nice woman Mrs. Leverett is, that perhaps she might be persuaded to go out as my guest, don't you know, Mr. Leverett, and take Miss Bassett with her, and just see poor Cameron round, and so on."

"That's rather a romantic proposal, isn't it, Mr. Weatherley?" said Leverett. "I'll speak to the ladies about it. Run down again this evening, will you?" Weatherley promised and went his way. Leverett mounted the stairs and burst in upon the women-folk like a bomb-shell. "That youngster's a brick," he cried, "and you two ladies," indicating his wife and Mary Bassett by a glance apiece, and a wave of a hand in the direction of each, "are going to Turkey."

"Going to Turkey?" gasped Mrs. Leverett feebly.

"The impetuous male animal," said Leverett, "asks pardon. Here's the case," sinking his voice to a confidential and persuasive tone. "You don't want me to make any bones about the matter with you two, do you? Mary, my dear child, I'm going to take an old man's privilege and talk to you like a father." He

laid a gentle hand on hers and patted it once or twice. "With you, Mrs. Leverett, I take a husband's privilege and address you in accents of—entreaty. Mary, you're as fond of Jack as ever you were, and you know how shamefully he's suffered. My dear, you're just as fond of Mary as you are of your own daughter, and you'll do anything to oblige me. Jack lies ill of a broken leg, with a Russian bullet in him, and young Weatherley (who is honestly sorry for all the trouble he has caused, and wants to make up for it) has travelled all the way from Shipka to ask you to make a journey to Philippiopolis and nurse Jack and make things up, and get him better. And when you've got him better and brought him home—one of you can marry him."

"But, Horace," said Mrs. Leverett, "the expense!"

"My dear," said Mr. Leverett, "this young man's money made the mischief to begin with. The young man asks you to go as his guests. Let his money make up, as far as it can, for the harm it did to begin with."

"I don't think we can do it, Horace," said Mrs. Leverett. "We can't accept the young man's offer. There's something—he means well, no doubt—but there's something in it that feels indelicate and—and curious, and—"

Mr. Leverett hailed an idea.

"I didn't tell you I was going, did I? Well, I am. I'm going out to look at things, and make sketches for a panorama on my own hook. And so long as I pay for you, it's no business of yours where I get the money from." He turned to Mary. "If I take you, will you come and make yourself happy, and the man that loves you happy too, my dear? It isn't a stage piece, you know, where everybody is bound to be miserable, and to have misunderstandings enough to reach to the middle of the third act. If I'd a Russian bullet through my leg you'd travel a mile or two to look at me, wouldn't you, old woman?" He turned to his wife again.

"Horace," said Mrs. Leverett, quite affected by this stroke of fancy, "you know I would."

"Then don't preach down a young girl's heart with formalities," said Leverett. "Propriety! Confound Propriety! Your husband's with you. And, my dear," turning once more to Mary, "your guardians are with you."

"Horace," cried Mrs. Leverett, "you will be running into danger to see this wretched war. You know you will."

"Old lady," said Mr. Leverett calmly, "I know a dodge worth two of it. I want to have a look at the local colour, and then if I

can't work enough out of the illustrated papers to make a dozen panoramas, I'm a Dutchman. Besides, Jack and Cassidy will come back with their sketch-books crammed. Anyway, I'm going, for I haven't got a brush-stroke to do at the theatre for the next two months, and I may never have the chance again."

"And how about Matilda?" asked Mrs. Leverett, with signs of yielding.

"Matilda?" asked her husband. "Now, don't you know, madam, as well as I do, that Matilda had arranged to spend a month with her aunt at Southsea? All things work together for good to them that walk uprightly. Come, come, my dears, no qualms. I pay the shot myself, and I shall make a fortune by the panorama."

When Mr. Weatherley turned up again that evening Mr. Leverett had a brief private interview with him.

"I'm going out myself," he said, "and I shall pay my own expenses, because I can make the journey pay. You're welcome to provide for the rest, but you mustn't let the women see it, or they'll be unhappy."

It took at least a week to make arrangements, and then they started. Mary felt as much need of forgiveness as she felt desire to forgive. Though the skies had fallen she

should have believed in Jack. And if any reader of this history should think her unmaidenly in thus going to the rescue of her wounded lover, he is welcome to his opinion. Jack was in Philippopolis a week before his friends and his sweetheart reached it, and he knew that they were coming. Hogan, as yet forgetful of the letter buried in his saddle-bags, and innocent of his share in the prolongation of these true lovers' woes, gave permission for the patient to be seen. It was thought wise not to excite him by keeping him waiting, and he knew of Mary's forgiveness already from Cassidy. So when she came pale and trembling into the chamber, and touched him tenderly with her lips, as if he had been a piece of fragile china, and might break beneath the daintiest handling, he put his arms about her, and took her to his heart.

"Jack," cried the girl, with his arms about her neck, and her tears upon his face, "how could I doubt you?"

"My darling!" Jack answered in his feeble voice, "how was it that I ever doubted you?"

Each found a ready answer for the other's self-accusation; but Cameron was a gentleman, and Mary was Montgomery Bassett's daughter, and so the answer on each side remained unspoken.

There are not many young gentlemen in the world who can endure with equanimity to see the matrimonial prize they sought adjudged to another, and Mr. Weatherley at least was not of that small self-sacrificing crew. But all things considered, the young man bore himself well, and though the fires burned within him, he consumed his own smoke in a manner fairly successful. He confided to Hogan the fact that he should never care for another woman. Cassidy was a sympathetic listener to his woes over many sentimental pipes smoked in the tent that had been Cameron's at Shipka; Colonel Savage D. Sprague, mindful of his own early evil fortune, lent an ear to his complaint; and it was natural enough that the lad should ask for sympathy. But he behaved with great manliness in Mary's presence, and he nursed Jack in her absence with a genuine devotion.

When the invalid began to get a little stronger Mrs. Leverett and Mary used to mount guard over him, and for an hour together it often happened that not a word would be spoken amongst them. The glaring summer light and heat that poured upon the house was softened on the ranges of the distant Rhodopes, and the invalid and his sweetheart would look out from the bedroom window on the wind-swept cloud shadows that chased each other across the hills,

and sometimes in the silence would hear the faint echoes of the battle in the Pass full thirty miles away. Mrs. Leverett in those drowsy afternoons would fain sleep with such success that after five minutes' feigning the reality would set in, and Jack and Mary found the music of her matronly snore welcome and enjoyable.

Now it befell that Messrs. Leverett and Cassidy, both of whom were at this time quartered at Shipka, made a journey to Philippopolis to visit the invalid, and most incautiously let out the secret of the manner of Jack's wound in Mrs. Leverett's hearing. There had been already a sufficient flavour of romance in the story of the two lovers, but Mrs. Leverett welcomed this addition to it with a sort of shuddering relish, and must needs begin to let fall dark and mysterious hints as to loverlike madness and the like, until Mary herself got an inkling of the truth. The truth looked terribly wicked — chiefly it took that complexion because it had been dangerous for Jack — and she resolved on drawing from him a disclaimer.

"You have never told me how you came to get hurt, Jack," she said one day. "Don't be afraid to speak about it, darling. I can bear it."

"Oh," said Jack, "I was sketching, and the beggars saw me and potted at me."

"Didn't you know that you were in danger, dear?" she asked.

"Well, of course," returned Jack, with an unsuccessful laugh, "you can't go through a campaign without being in a little danger sometimes."

"But didn't you know that you were in particular danger then?" The young man read at least a guess at the truth in her face and voice, and his guilt and his disloyalty tied his tongue. "It isn't true, dear? Say that it isn't true." At this he read more than a guess at the truth, and hung his head in shame. Mary began to cry, and for a while they sat without a word. "Jack," she said at last, "how could you be so cruel?"

"My darling," said the lover, much ashamed and stricken, "I hoped that you would never know of it. I was a fool and a villain, but I have been a fool and a villain all along."

"No, no, no," she said. "But you will never doubt me any more, Jack. Will you?"

Jack for sole answer stumbled out of his invalid chair in spite of his game leg and Hogan's orders, and, falling on his knees before her, possessed himself of one of her hands and kissed it over and over again. By-and-bye he

began to murmur in a voice made half inarticulate by his kisses, but the words "truest," "best," and "dearest," and others of that kindred reached his sweetheart's ears. Then in a while he tried to struggle to his feet for a pretty obvious purpose, but Mary became frightened for him.

"Oh, Jack," she cried, "take care, take care."

"I'll have one kiss if I die for it," said Jack.

"Let me help you up," she answered, in genuine fear.

"Give me the kiss first," he whispered, looking up at her, "and tell me you forgive me."

She stooped towards him, her face all rosy and her eyes moist. He caught her by the waist, and, drawing her to her knees, he kissed her again and again.

"We will never doubt each other any more?" he said.

"Never," she answered. "Never." And without any show of coyness she put her arms about his neck and kissed him back again.

"Dear eyes!" said Jack, regarding them. "I promised a year ago that they should never shed another tear if I could help it. They shall shed no more for any doubts of mine."

He turned a little white at this juncture,

and Mary had some difficulty in getting him back into the invalid chair. When he was settled he took her hand and would not let it go, even when he fell asleep, as from sheer weakness and prostration he did ten minutes later. Hogan coming in found them still handed, and there was a blush on the girl's face which the Irish bachelor medico thought anything but unbecoming. There was a soft moisture on the invalid's forehead, and a soft colour on his cheek, and his breath went and came like a child's.

"Keep him quiet, whatever ye do, Miss Bassett," said Hogan. "He's getting on lovely, but ye mustn't allow 'm to be at all exoytud."

Perhaps the medico had at least a glimmer of inward light, but he said no more, and went his way, leaving the lovers to themselves.

People say sometimes that it is worth while to be ill, to enjoy getting well again. There was such a rapture in these hearts, that it seemed worth while to have been separated to come thus once more together, with broken faith made whole and sound again. As for Bassett's shame, they buried it; and they were as happy in one another as it is possible for anybody to be in this world, where no man's happiness—or woman's either—is allowed to be long unclouded. And, since there is no joy greater for loyal

natures than to find, and know, and prove, that those they love are loyal in spite of terrible doubt or faith downright shattered and broken, we may leave awhile these two lovers to their well-earned bliss, and be content about them.

And as old Spencer sayeth, nearing the close of his voluminous story, so say I, nearing the end of this, much slenderer :

“ Now furl your sails, ye jolly marineres,  
For we be come into a quiet road ! ”

## CHAPTER XII.

IN the year 1879, at the Mudpool Hall of Thespis, Mr. Pelham Vane appeared in a round of Shakespearian characters, and attracted some attention among the local playgoers. There were Mudpoolians who had been to London, and there were some of these who had seen the great actors of the present and the past. At the Mudpool Hotel these gentlemen discussed the style of Mr. Pelham Vane, and had various opinions as to the school to which that tragedian belonged. He reminded one or two of Macready—it was generally conceded that his manner was mellower than that of Mr. Phelps—and he reminded others of the late great Montgomery Bassett.

Mr. Pelham Vane when seen off the boards was elderly and seedy. He was attired in black broadcloth, greasy at the shoulders and white at the seams, and his linen was commonly dingy enough to justify its owner's desire to shroud it in obscurity. His lips looked bibulous and his nose was of a purplish red,

whilst his cheeks and chin were of a dirty plum colour with many years of close shaving. He had a very deep bass voice and a pompous manner, and he talked a great deal about the better days he had seen. It was evident that he was a person of some education, and when he had had a little too much to drink, he would brag of the great acquaintances he had owned upon a time, and the triumphs he had achieved upon the London boards. There were people in Mudpool, as there had been elsewhere, who had faith in these legends, and there were people who had not. Party feeling ran more than commonly high on the Saturday night which saw Mr. Pelham Vane's last performance of "Macbeth" in the town of Mudpool. Things had been so prosperous during the past fortnight that not merely did the theatrical ghost walk on that particular evening, but the manager (who was honest according to his lights and means) paid up some portion of old arrears.

Mr. Pelham Vane walked ponderously into the bar-parlour at a quarter to eleven o'clock, buttoned to the chin, and wearing a hat of suspicious gloss.

"Good evening, gentlemen," said Mr. Vane. The company murmured a respectful answer, the faces of the guests wore a vacant air, and

their eyes looked anywhere rather than at Mr. Vane. That gentleman's arrival had put a sudden finish to an animated discussion upon his artistic style, his personal bearing, and his antecedents, and for a moment the Mudpoolians, who were not a rapid people, had no other topic ready.

Riper, the miller, a sober man enough as a rule, had somewhat exceeded in his potations, and in those circumstances was apt to play the hard-headed fellow, not to be put down by clamour, and determined to express his own convictions. His compeers had been content to let him talk noisily to himself in a corner until now, and Riper, observing the lull, but being too far gone to take cognizance of its cause, addressed the conclave.

"*Now* you'll listen to reason," said the miller, with a corkscrew motion of the thumb. "Bashet? He's no more like 'Gomery Bashet than I am—no more like than chalk's like cheese."

Mr. Pelham Vane turned and surveyed the speaker with a startled look, and it was plain to everybody except the drunken miller that the actor recognized himself as the subject of discourse.

"'Gomery Bashet," pursued Mr. Riper, rejoicing in the silence, and feeling that he had at last secured an audience, "was the very finest

actor ever lived. That's what *he* was. And as for this feller, why——" Mr. Story, the iron-monger, drove an accidental elbow into the miller's ribs, and Mr. Riper, who was quarrelsome in his cups, changed his theme, and heaped abuse upon his neighbour. The onlookers breathed more freely.

There was at the Mudpool Hotel, as there generally is in these cases, a curious mixture of contempt and reverence in the mental attitude of the *habitués* towards Mr. Pelham Vane. There was something, beyond doubt, of the vagabond and the nomad about him, and the Mudpoolians knew well enough why he buttoned his coat so closely. And yet there was a divinity that hedged him, and in a dim sort of way they looked on him as an artist. He was not wholly respectable, but he could do something which they could not do, and he had had experiences beyond their narrow sphere, and something of the glamour of the parts he played still hung about him, seedy as he was.

"Scotch whiskey hot, Mr. Povey, if you please," said the tragedian in tones that filled the room, and left a mellow tinkle among the glasses on the shelves. There was silence again, and the magnificent, shabby man turned to the miller. "I believe I heard you make a very complimentary reference just now to my old friend,

Montgomery Bassett, sir," he said. "May I ask you where you saw him play?"

"I don't know what that's got to do with you," returned the miller.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the player. "I was under the impression that I addressed a gentleman."

"That serves *you* right, Riper," said the iron-monger, and an affirming murmur went round the room.

"Not as I mind answering the question," said the miller, feeling himself in a marked minority. "I seen him in Southampton the last time he played there. And I say again—meaning no offence to anybody—he was the best actor as ever lived, bar none. And what *I* say, I stick to."

Now there was in this an intentional and obvious insult to the player, and one of the company tried an emollient.

"Present company is always excepted."

"I don't except nobody, past nor present," said the miller obstinately. "What I say is, the late 'Gomery Bashet was finest actor ever was in the world."

"I am proud to hear you say so, sir," cried the player in his ponderous tones. "Bassett was my dearest friend." The miller looked at him with scornful incredulousness.

lity. "I am proud to hear you say so, sir," said the player again. "Another Scotch hot, if you please, Mr. Povey."

When one came to look at Mr. Pelham Vane one found signs of wreckage by drink upon him. When he lifted his glass to his lips his hand shook terribly, and his eyes gloated on the glass, before he drank it, with a whiskey-and-watery gleam.

"'Gomery Bashet," said the disagreeable miller, "was a gentleman."

"He was, sir," assented the player. "One of Nature's noblemen."

"He'd have scorned to have come anear a place like this," said the miller. "He could ha' kep' his carriages and his horses if he'd ha' minded to."

"He had a soul above ostentation," said Mr. Pelham Vane.

"He'd got a soul above *you*," said the drunken miller. "*You* a friend o' 'Gomery Bashet's? Why, he wouldn't ha' looked at you."

The player made a step forward, with his right hand clawing at the breast of his tight-buttoned, threadbare coat.

"This is the first occasion," he said in his slow-rolling, noble tones, "on which I have heard poverty and misfortune insulted in the

presence of an assemblage of English gentlemen."

"Riper," said Mr. Bonner, the linendraper, "if *you* don't know how to behave yourself, there's them as does."

Gall, the saddler, stated audibly that he blushed for Riper. "And I hope, sir," said Mr. Gall, addressing the player, "that you'll have one with me, sir, if it's only to take the taste out of your mouth."

"I thank you, sir," said the play-actor. "Scotch hot, Mr. Povey, if you please. I have the pleasure of taking it at this gentleman's expense." The host handed him the mixture, and he bowed round, glass in hand. "Gentlemen," he said, "I hope, as sweet Will has it, that we shall drink down all unkindness. So far as I am concerned, I can assure you that no praise of my dear old friend Bassett can offend me. I knew him, gentlemen, in his boyhood. I watched his dawning genius. I stood by him in the hour of his success; and to me alone is intrusted the secret of his retreat. I was, and am, so poor as you see me, his bosom friend."

"Look here. I don't care," cried the drunken miller, rising and struggling with the friends who endeavoured to keep him down. "I'm not a-going to sit all night long and

hear this feller bounce and brag and talk nonsense. Him a friend of Bashet's? I tell you to your face," he cried, shaking his fist at the player, "he wouldn't ha' looked at you, or spoke to you, or anything like you. Don't tell me."

Mr. Pelham Vane saw that the general feeling of the assemblage was with him and against the miller. He felt that it would cost but little to be courageous.

"It would ill become a friend of Montgomery Bassett's, gentlemen," he said therefore, "to wrangle in his name in the parlour of a public hostelry. Scotch hot, Mr. Povey, if you please." A hand was laid upon him from behind. "Thanks, dear boy. At this gentleman's expense, Mr. Povey."

A commercial gentleman from London, a young man of much experience of life, and highly respected in Mudpool for his business and his social qualities, was seen at this juncture to draw forth a memorandum book and to scrawl a line upon a blank page. This he tore out, and having folded it threw it across to the drunken miller.

"Can't make it out," said the miller to his neighbour. "Wass he say?"

The neighbour, with raised eyebrows, gazed at the brief scroll and whistled. Then he

whispered behind his hand to the miller, and the miller laughed scornfully.

"I say, mister," he cried, reaching out a hand towards the player, "perhaps you'll say you *are* Bashet in a minute. There's a cove in the room to back you."

The actor glanced round swiftly, and for a moment his watery glance rested on the young man from London, but he said nothing.

"That Bashet?" cried the miller. "Look at him."

For once in his life Mr. Riper created a sensation, and every man in the room stared from the actor to him, and from him to the actor. Mr. Pelham Vane, adding a little cold water to his grog to reduce its temperature, took it at a gulp and pushed the glass towards the landlord. It was noticed afterwards how pale he grew and how his hand shook at this juncture.

"That's Montgomery Bassett, is it?" cried the miller jeeringly, with his head craned over the table in the direction of the commercial man from London.

"Yes, sir," thundered the player's voice, "I *am* Montgomery Bassett. Myself am Naples. Ruined by the devices of my only child, cast forth so low that wrens make prey where eagles dared not perch! I thought my spirits were stronger than my shames, but I am vanquished."

And the great tragedian, turning, flung his arms upon the mantelpiece and dropped his head upon them, scattering a pot or two, and making havoc with a dozen of long churchwardens. The company sat and stared at all this with a look at once amazed and guilty. The saddler was the first to recover, and he, rising from his seat, put his hand in his pocket, and withdrawing it, dropped something with a jingle in the landlord's palm. Then he cast his head with a shamefaced, sideway nod in the direction of the fireplace over which Mr. Montgomery Bassett leaned with heaving shoulders, and with another shamefaced jerk directed to the company at large, he took himself out of the room. The ironmonger rose also, and from his pocket drew a something which jingled into the landlord's palm. Then arose the drunken miller and went through the same pantomime, and in a minute or two the room was clear of everybody but Mr. Montgomery Bassett and the landlord. Mr. Bassett's shoulders were still heaving convulsively, and his head was still resting on the mantelpiece amid the *débris* of the long churchwardens, when the landlord touched him on the arm, and the actor, slowly gathering himself into an erect posture, picked up his hat, and with one hand covering his eyes, began to grope his way from the room.

"Before you go, sir," said the landlord feel-

ingly; "it's an inappropriate moment, sir, but it may be the only one, and the gentlemen of the town, sir, who have seen your performances, sir, desired to present you with a little testimonial, sir. The sums are here as I received them, and perhaps if you will buy for yourself, sir, some little remembrance of the place—a pin, or a ring, or anything of that sort that may please you—you will fulfil the intentions of the subscribers, sir."

The landlord had never been so quick-witted in his life before, and the little falsehood might not be charged very heavily in the account against him. Mr. Montgomery Bassett's outstretched hand accepted the money the landlord slipped into it, and a minute later he was gone. Mudpool saw him no more, and if his landlord found the little bundle of soiled linen a poor payment for a fortnight's rent, why, everybody knew how disturbed the great tragedian had been by his unexpected recognition, and nobody thought very ill of his forgetfulness.

## CHAPTER XIII.

“Go light, ye thief,” said Mr. Cassidy, addressing Mr. Hogan, “or else ye’ll week the beeby. The campaigning ways stick to ye still, and ye disturb the harmony of married loife with no more compunction, be Jingo, than ye’d feel on walking into a den of wild bachelors. What’s the news?”

“There’s nothing particular,” said Mr. Hogan, seating himself, “barrin’ that I’ve got the model I tould ye of. I was down in the Dials yesterday to see the Colonial Bishop, and the late captain in the Life Guards. What liars they are, to be sure! If a man comes down in the world, he’s always been a real swell before his fall. The man that’s coming to sit to-night is the Reverend Stanley Vyvyan, the Lord be good to us. He had a rural deanery in Yorkshire, he says, and the Colonial Bishop swears he knows him, and so does the late captain in the Guards.”

“It’s a queer nest ye’ve loighted on, anyway,” said Cassidy.

"Queer?" returned Hogan, "I believe you! They're not so squalid as you'd fancy, living in a den like that, and they're all men of some edukeetion, me boy. The Bishop knows the Greek alphabet—that was as far as I could test him—but his Latin's extremely shaky. The Reverend Stanley Vyvyan doesn't know what *arma virumque cano* means, and for a Rural Dean that's singular. But he'll be here at eight this evening, and if ye don't foind him the identical man ye want, I'm mistaken."

"We'll see," said Cassidy. "'Twas a great oydaya, 'Cassidy's evening life class!' I've twenty pupils already, and it helps to keep the pot boiling. Cameron's coming round to-night to see how we're gettin' on; and his wife will be up to compare the boys. When are *you* going to be married, Hogan?"

"At the beginning of the Greek kalends," said Hogan.

"With these shining examples of domestic felicity before ye?" demanded Cassidy. - "Who'll be that at the door?" A pause and then a tap. "Come in."

"Mr. and Mrs. Cameron, sir," said the maid.

"Welcome, me boy. Mrs. Cameron, ye haven't forgotten Hogan. Jane, ask Mrs.

Cassidy to come here. And how are *you*, Jack junior? How the boy grows, Mrs. Cameron! Oh, ye're here, Matilda. Just send upstairs for Horace Cassidy, Esquire, will ye? Ye'll take it neetive in the pewter, wont ye, Jack? Go on smokin', Hogan. Both the ladies are smoke-dried."

Mrs. Cassidy having welcomed the guests, ran upstairs, and returned presently with her eldest son, who wore a prodigious rolled curl upon his forehead, and was absurdly like his father.

"Shake hands with Jack, Horace, me boy," cried the proud parent. "I hope ye'll be as good friends as your fathers were before ye. But ye'll be getting too big a swell to know us much longer, Cameron, though maybe when you're in the Forty you'll put in a word for a daub of poor ould Cassidy's now and then, and get the Committee to hang me where I can be seen."

"Rely upon my influence" said Cameron, with a lordly air. At that everybody laughed, and the three men sat down to smoke, while the ladies talked millinery.

Even when love is crowned by happy marriage, ladies do sometimes talk millinery, and husbands smoke apart the while, and the world goes on very much as if nothing of

any first-rate importance had happened. But surely it was a pleasant thing for the two old friends to sit together with the two wives beside, and the two little fellows playing about the room. A sense, subdued yet present, of sorrows ended and flown, was with them both, and the present smiled the sweeter for the stormy past.

"Who should we meet, on our way here this afternoon," said Cameron, "but your great father-in-law, renowned Leverett! I told him that we were going to turn up this evening to look at the life class, and he promised that he'd look in."

"We're going to have a swell model to-night," said Cassidy. "Hogan found him, and proclaims him the most picturesque old blackguard in the world."

"He's a beard this long," said Hogan, stretching his arms abroad, "and a fine high, bold forehead, and barring that he's a trifle red about the nose, he'd be a wonderful John the Baptist."

"Well," said Jack, "we'll come and look at him." There was the faintest memory in the world of an old limp in his gait as he arose and crossed over to his wife. "Come along, little woman, or we shall be late for dinner. You wont forget to-morrow's dinner, Mrs. Cassidy?"

That's chiefly what we called for. We know where your head fails you, Bill. No memory."

"Now, that's unfair," cried Cassidy. "D'ye know what that's about, Hogan? I asked Mrs. Cameron and Jack to dinner last week, and they came just as I'd forgotten all about the invitation, and got the boy and the beeby to bed, and left them in care o' the maid, and had taken the wife out to a quiet little dinner by ourselves, and a box at the Oberon. I'll never hear the last of it. Ye'll stop here and dine, Hogan. It's just a cut of mutton, and no more, but there's a very reasonable clar't in the cellar—round the corner—and I'll have it up in honour of your visit."

Cameron and his wife went away, taking their boy with them, and Mrs. Cassidy retired to look after the dinner.

"They're a happy couple, Bill," said Hogan, when the two men sat alone again.

"They are, then," returned Cassidy, "and so they ought to be, to make up for all their troubles. There's only one thing on the dear girl's mind at all, and that's her blackguard of a father. He's been heard of once or twice since their marriage, and I believe she'd forgive him now if she could foind him. But I fancy he's gone under long ago, and I could bear to think that without wantin' to give a very large order for black clothes, oyther."

"I'm not dyin' to see him," said Hogan, pulling placidly at his pipe, "if only half I've heard of him's true."

"'Twas a pity ye forgot the letter I wrote to Jack," said Cassidy. "If that had reached him he'd have been back in time to save the old beggar turning her out of doors, anyway. And the world's not so virtuous that a crime prevented doesn't count for something."

"I'm sorry I forgot it, tew," said Hogan. "I'm not a marryin' man meself, Bill, but 'twas pretty to see them down at Scutari when he was comin' round. The way she'd support him with her shoulder, and the way she'd look at 'm when they walked about by them cypresses. D'ye remember?"

"Remember? Me own wife was jealous of me, I talked about her so when I came home. But here's dinner going to be laid, and I'll just go round and give the orders to the butler."

Mr. Cassidy presiding at his own family table was a pleasant spectacle, and the dinner went merry as a marriage bell. A pipe and a cup of coffee prepared for the evening's labours, and whilst the friends sat chatting, the maid brought up a singularly dirty piece of rough cardboard on which was written, "Rev. Stanley Vyvyan."

"Now tell me," said Hogan, "what you think of me as a model-hunter."

The two went down together and encountered in the hall a bent and tottering old man with a great beard.

"This way," said Cassidy, and the man followed, stepping slowly and with difficulty. "Have y'ever been a model before?"

"That degradation is reserved for me," said the new model, in deep and husky tones.

"Eighty odd years of sorrow have I seen,  
And each hour's joy wrecked with a week of teen,"

but it has never yet fallen to my lot to earn my living by any menial service."

"Has he been drinking?" asked Cassidy, aside.

"No, I think not," responded Hogan. "That's his regular form, me boy. He never speaks except with a verse out of Scripture."

"Take off your hat," said Cassidy, "and let's have a look at you. Now, you'll just sit here, d'ye see, in this arm-chair on the platform, and hould on to this halberd, like that. Wait a minute. Ye'll be the better of a cloak. Now there y'are. Head a little more to the right. Left foot out a bit.

That'll do. Now ye can rest a bit and take it easy till ye're wanted."

Cassidy moving away with his head on one side surveyed the model with the look of a connoisseur.

"Take it easy. You're not wanted for the next five minutes, any way."

The students turned in by ones and twos, and the model being finally arranged, the work began, enlivened after the manner of student labour by the singing of popular airs and the whistling of operatic selections.

"He's picturesque enough, isn't he?" said Hogan in a whisper.

Cassidy had begun to regard the model with a new interest, and he answered Hogan only after drawing him away into a distant corner of the room.

"I believe ye've made a find with a vengeance," said he then. "He's amazingly altered, with the hair about his face, and the baldness that's set in. But I ought to know that nose and those eyes, and I believe it's no less than Montgomery Bassett!"

"Rubbish!" said Hogan.

"I'm not so sure of that, me boy," answered Cassidy. "Give him a black wig and shave him, and he might be as loike as two peas."

"That's not Bassett," said Hogan con-

temptuously. "He said he was eighty and odd just now, and he looks every inch of it."

"Well," said Cassidy resignedly, "he's here now, whoever he is. You'll see if Cameron spots 'm."

Cameron at that minute appearing, Cassidy welcomed him with a manner somewhat forced and unnatural.

"What d'ye think of the model, Jack?"

"He'll do well enough," returned Cameron unconcernedly, and walked round the room from easel to easel glancing at the work.

"Well, now," said Hogan with a laugh, "Vyvyan's Vyvyan still, isn't he?"

"I'm glad I was wrong," answered William.

A notable silence stole over the room, and the master of the life class turning round saw that the model had shifted his position slightly. The students were all staring at him, but not a pencil was at work. Cameron was directly in front of the model's throne, and the Reverend Stanley Vyvyan was moving slowly towards him with head and hands only. The painter looked up and caught the model's eyes. He fell back with outstretched hands, and then dashed forward just in time to seize the bar of the halberd as the blade swept round at him, and the striker towered at full height on the throne.

"Be Moses," roared Cassidy, "it's Bassett, after all!"

There was no struggle to speak of. Cameron had the halberd out of the man's hands in the twinkling of an eye; and Cassidy, seizing the model from behind, dragged him back to the seat, and pinned him there with a grasp against which it was vain for him to wrestle.

"Of all men else I have avoided thee," cried the model, "but get thee back. You prosper, do you? and I am even the natural fool of fortune. Unhand me, sir! I'll join with black despair against my soul, and to myself become an enemy!"

"Jack," said Cassidy, holding on behind, "he's as mad as a hatter."

"Mad?" cried Montgomery Bassett. "Put me to the test, and I the matter aptly will reward, madness would gambol from. You live yet," he said, his deep tones more husky and shaky than of old. "But where is my daughter? Give me back my daughter."

"Run for a doctor, one of you fellows," shouted Cassidy. "Oh, I beg your pardon, Hogan; I forgot ye. Come and look at this demented ould rascal, and see if he's mad or not."

Years of whiskey, and brooding, and remorse, had done no service to Montgomery Bassett's mind; and, if he were not absolutely mad, one

delusion was fixed within him, permanent and unshakable. Outside the influence of that delusion he was as sane as ever; and the nature of his error might make it dangerous to the business interests of the commonweal to set him down as a madman. He had only persuaded himself that the man whom he had injured had injured him—a feat performed every day in the year by the stupidest as well as the ablest of men.

“We’re most of us mad, more or less,” said Hogan cheerfully; “but I’m inclined to think, be the oye of ’m, he’s only mad nor’-nor’-west. Ould man, if ye’re noisy, it’s a strait-waistcoat that’s weetin’ for ye. Let him go, Cassidy.”

Mr. Bassett was as mild as new milk.

“Ye see,” said Hogan, “he’s permeable to reason. Hould still, I tell ye, or I’ll have ye in a strait-waistcoat in a jiffy. They’re in plenty on the premises. Look at ’m. He’s loike a choild, for the moildness of his demaynour.”

“Mr. Cameron,” said Bassett, “but for you I should have lived a prosperous life, and my old age would have been surrounded with honour; love, obedience, troops of friends. But that which should accompany old age—— Ichabod!” cried the model wildly, “Ichabod! the glory is departed!”

“Take it easy, now,” suggested Hogan.

“I ask nothing better,” said Mr. Montgomery

Bassett, "than to leave a presence distasteful to every instinct of my better nature."

"Is this how you do it, Bill?" cried a new voice at the door. "Is it amateur theatricals, or painting from the life, or what is it?"

"Come in, Horace," said Cassidy, with a sigh. "I'd hoped ye'd see the school respectable. But, begorra, here's Bassett back again; and I believe it's him instead of Beaconsfield that's demoralized the British Islands."

"Oh," said Leverett, advancing, "this is Bassett, is it? What's the matter?"

"Hogan brought him for a model," said William.

"Take him upstairs," suggested Leverett quietly. "There's a family quarrel in it, Bill; and dirty linen is always better washed in private."

"Gentlemen," said Cassidy, "I'm very sorry to deprive ye of the night's instruction, but I'm afraid under the circumstances—"

"Come along, boys," sang out one of the students, and the crowd trooped noisily away, with many backward glances.

"What'll we do with 'm?" asked Cassidy.

"Heaven knows," said Jack in answer. "I'm expecting Mary every minute, and it would be terrible for her to find him here in this condition."

Mr. Bassett had cast away the cloak, and his garments, in the broad gaslight, were seen to be foul and tattered.

"Bassett," said Cassidy, "ye've been the blackest villain I ever heard of. But there's nobody here want's to hit a man that's down, and I think ye'd better go."

"Sir," said Bassett, "I am not wont to be ordered from any man's house. I will go. He took up his battered hat from the throne, and marched majestically towards the door; but just as he was about to lay a hand upon it, it opened of its own volition, and there stood his daughter. She knew him in a second. Her outstretched hands, and the look with which she regarded him, told as much, too plainly to be doubted. His own look, and the start he gave, may have helped her.

Jack ran to his wife's side, and put an arm about her.

"My child is still my child," said Mr. Bassett, with mournful dignity. "I have fallen low in the world's esteem since last I saw you, Mary, and I have suffered much. But—I can still forgive."

If Mary Bassett had ever hoped for any meeting, the vision she had cherished had been far, far different from this. In face of the reality she could but cling blindly to her husband's arm.

"I should e'en die with pity," said Mr. Bassett, naturally disposed to find in the woes of King Lear the nearest poetic semblance to his own, "to see another thus. Do not laugh at me, for as I am a man I think this lady to be my child."

"Bassett," said Cameron, quietly but sternly, "I wont endure this. Go."

"Jack," besought his wife, "don't turn him out like this. Oh, papa!"

Nobody saw how it came about, but she was clinging to his neck, foul and tattered as he was, and villain as he had been, and they were both upon their knees together.

"Poor, poor dear," she cried, with a broken voice and fast-falling tears. "To have been so wicked and so cruel. And to have suffered so." She could speak no further, but her clinging arms and raining tears spoke more than any words. She took the bald, unvenerable head to her true breast and nursed it there, and rocked it to and fro.

No man spoke a word or laid a hand upon either of them, and on a sudden Montgomery Bassett began to sob and cry terribly with an emotion not of the stage or stagey, and for once in his life the actor forgot to play even to himself, and sacred nature had full swing within his shallow heart.

There is no revenge diviner than forgiveness, and this vengeance his daughter took upon him.

The men slipped past the two kneeling figures, and left the father and child together.

Mr. Montgomery Bassett, provided with a yearly income of one hundred pounds (by a son-in-law who is at last convinced of his own unworthiness), and clad in black broadcloth, and clean shaven, is not so unlike his former self that old friends refuse to recognize him. He is not now so popular as he once was when he had more money, but he has his little circle of old admirers still, and he himself is happy in having forgiven Jack Cameron, who maintains him. Jack prospers so that Mr. Bassett is likely enough to have a grievance against him shortly on the score of his allowance, which seems to him curiously incommensurate with his son-in-law's income.

The old man attends his daughter dutifully, and takes luncheon with her daily. Jack is so prodigiously busy that a sandwich and a glass of claret served in the studio are all he can afford to take from breakfast-time to the dinner-hour, but it is noticeable that this increase in his necessary labour has only come about since it pleased fate to restore his father-in-law.

When last I called on Mrs. Cameron (Cassidy, having learned that Bassett was there, declined to

enter, and shook hands at the door), she was knitting a vest for a curley-headed, handsome little fellow who was playing about her knees. The lad was at romps with the kitten, and the two young wild animals together carried the sweet little lady's ball of worsted all about the room, winding it round the leg of every chair and sofa and table. Bassett was sitting by her, and it is possible that the presence of a stranger gave some spur to his fatherly impulses. At any rate he went down upon his knees—when the nurse had removed both the boy and the kitten—and having carefully unwound the worsted, he rolled it up and offered it to his daughter, who kissed him, being in the presence of an old friend, with no embarrassment. The old fellow grinned under his glossy new black wig, and kissed her back again.

“There, my dear,” said he with a flourish, handing her the ball, “am I not a Model Father?”

THE BISHOP AND MR. LATAZZI.



## THE BISHOP AND Mr. LATAZZI.

### CHAPTER I.

SOME thirty years ago there lived in a little town near the middle of England a motherless and fatherless young woman, who had a small fortune of her own and was taken care of by a maiden aunt. The young orphan in a kitchenish helpless way was pretty and engaging, and she had very ripe plump features and a very ripe plump figure. These charms coupled with the ripe plump balance at her banker's made her well liked by her contemporaries, and she was much sought after by the young men of the town and its neighbourhood. The district was given over chiefly to the production of ironware, and the deceased Richard Jones, father of the plump and ripe young woman, had dealt prosperously in a wholesale way in fire-shovels, rakes, hoes, garden-spades, saddlers' ironmongery, and the like. The young men

who courted Letitia Jones were engaged for the most part in similar pursuits, and had to do with iron in one form or another. The girl was very much puzzled to choose between them. It was, in a way, incumbent upon her to get married—if for no other reason than to escape their importunities and give all but one of the poor things a chance to make another choice; but for a while Letitia could not decide for herself, and being unwilling to accept the maiden aunt's dictum upon a question of so much importance, found nobody to decide for her. All the young men were nice in their various ways, all tolerably well to do, all devoted, and all ready to eat each other out of rivalry.

The problem solved itself as such problems sometimes will, and Letitia chose none of the suitors who had dangled about her for the last year or two. A new-comer beat them all out of the field.

Unhappily this new-comer was a rascal, not of the conventional but of the melodramatic type. If he had only gambled, or had only drunk, or had only beaten his wife, or had only been unfaithful, or even if he had merely done (as he did) all these rascally things, this story would never have to be written. But the villainies of Major Reginald Barclay carried

themselves beyond these unobtrusive limits, and lifted him for a week or two into a celebrity almost European.

In his way he was a fine-looking fellow, until his dissipated habits began to set their mark on his handsome but sinister features, and little Letitia went down before his black eyes as though they were *mitrailleurs*. The Major came, saw, and overcame, and long before he thought it worth his while to make more than the most cautious advances, the girl had given him all her foolish little heart. When he told her he loved her she could scarcely believe that so much pride and joy could live in one bosom as brightened hers, and her happiness was like a pain to her many a time.

Letitia's father had been a fairly good business man, and was wise enough in his generation to guard his child, as well as the construction of his last will and testament could do it, from the assaults of adventurers. The girl's sole legal guardian was a keenish country lawyer, who naturally demanded an inquiry into the Major's affairs when marriage began to be talked of. At this period of his career the black-avised Reginald was all milk and honey. He admitted the necessity for such an inquiry as the lawyer demanded, and was ready to lay open his affairs in the most

candid manner. It happened fortunately that his lawyer had come down from town just at that time—so he told the guardian—to discuss some proposals of importance with respect to the sale of a portion of the family property. Perhaps the two would confer together at once? The country lawyer agreed, and the London lawyer came over to see him. It never came out very clearly in what way the swindle was effected—Letitia's lawyer was naturally shy of talking about the matter afterwards—but it was known that there were some forged documents in the case, and some others that turned out to have been stolen. The London lawyer had been struck off the Rolls three years before—a clever, plausible, gentlemanlike dog—and was almost as thorough-paced a scoundrel as his employer, who was a prince amongst adventurers in his day. It was enough that the girl's guardian was satisfied at the time, and that everybody concerned was very neatly and completely hoodwinked. The marriage took place, and the Major and his wife went on the Continent for their honeymoon.

The Major had raised two or three thousand pounds, “for the improvement of a portion of his property”—the contemplated sales not having been carried out—and whilst that sum lasted he was amiable and complaisant enough,

although it was not long before his wife discovered his fondness for drink. But when the newly-married couple got to Baden-Baden the green table so drew the husband that the wife found herself lonely morning, noon, and night. When the rascal won he would buy valuable presents for her, but that was only just at first; and later on, whenever he lost, he would go home and abuse her, and a little later still would beat her. For a time he was lucky, and the poor Letitia had more watches, and bracelets, and brooches than a dozen women could have worn at one time. She used to sit and turn them over whilst he was away at the gaming-table, and would kiss them, and would cry over them, and would try them on in a compound of love, and vanity, and sorrow. But when the Major's tide of ill-fortune fairly set in, all these pretty things went with the remnant of his pretty manners. When screams were heard after midnight the servants in the little villa the Major had taken for the season knew that their master had lost and that their mistress was paying for his losses. Such ugly whispers reached the not over-particular society of Baden-Baden that nobody would associate with Major Barclay, and his wife was an object of universal pity.

One morning Letitia sat alone at the break-

fast-table crying over a letter from the maiden aunt, not noisily, but with a quiet misery which must have been pitiable for anything with a heart to look at, and whilst she was looking at the lines which her tears made unreadable in came the Major. He was not often up in time for breakfast, but on this occasion he was about earlier than usual, having been up all night with a private card-party. Of course, when it was said just now that nobody would associate with him, a certain black-leg, shameless margin was understood. There is nobody with whom nobody will associate—not even a hangman is altogether isolated.

“What have you got to snivel at now?” demanded the Major. “When a man comes home he naturally likes to find things cheerful.”

“Reginald,” said the wife piteously, “don’t be angry with me.”

“Angry?” returned the aggrieved husband. “You’d rile a seraph. What *have* you got to snivel at?” Letitia wiped her eyes unobtrusively.

“I have a letter from Aunt Lucretia this morning,” she answered.

“And what the devil’s the matter with *her*?” inquired the Major in a tone which bespoke no great interest in Aunt Lucretia’s well-being.

"Nothing, darling, nothing," said Letitia. "She only says she's glad to know I am so—so—ha—ha—happy." And she began to cry again.

"You look it," said the Major with an oath. "Stash it!" he roared suddenly, and she shrank under his raised hand, cowering. Reginald used curious expressions sometimes, of which she knew nothing and could guess nothing except that perhaps they were in use among military men. "You'll have lots of time to snivel by yourself. I'm going to England for a day or two. I suppose I shall be away a fortnight."

"May I come too?" she asked, though she stood in deadly fear of him.

"No, you can't come too," he answered, jeering at her. "You let me hear that you've left Baden whilst I'm away, and I'll——" He did not say what he would do, but he had been cruel enough to inspire her with abject terror of him already, and she did not know where he would stop. So far he had never actually beaten her whilst he had been sober, but she never knew what might be coming. "I'm going over on business, and I can't be bothered with you. You'll write and tell your Aunt Lucretia that dear Reginald will call upon her, and you'll be very prettily sorry that you are not quite

strong enough to make such a hasty journey there and back, and you'll say that dear Reginald has provided everything you wish for and that you have charming friends, and wont be a bit lonely while dear Reginald's away. I shall start at two o'clock, and you'll have plenty of time to write the letter. I'll read it and post it before I go."

She was in such fear of him that she obeyed him, though she had to write the lying letter three times over, because her tears had blotted the first and second editions of it. When her husband came to read it he seemed to think its professions of affection for dear Reginald wanting in gusto, which perhaps under the circumstances was natural.

"You'll write to me while I'm away, wont you, darling?" asked the blackguard scoffingly.

"Yes, dear," said Letitia, scarcely daring to look at him.

"Give me what money you have," he said, a moment later; "I mayn't have enough. You wont want for anything — your credit's good enough for a fortnight."

She obeyed him in fear and trembling, and he went his way, leaving her in tears behind him. They had been married nearly five months by this time, and tears had been so usual that they almost seemed part of a married life to her.

For two or three days she was lonely and miserable enough, but by-and-bye, being not yet altogether crushed, her youthful heart lifted her up a little bit, and she began to hope that when he came back he would be kinder, and to think how cheerful and long-suffering she would always be, and what she would do to win him into gentleness and to keep him away from drink and gaming. A canary might as well have tried to tame a rattlesnake as she to tame the Major; but how should she know what manner of man he was? There are few women who could imagine such a man, and they are not of the sort we care to know or to think about. There were very few vices with which the Major was not familiar, and if he had any virtues he hid them so well during his earthly career that no man ever had a glimpse of one of them. The optimist denies it, but there *are* such men—mistaken egotists who take the wrong way to coddle themselves, and are as unsusceptible of any civilising influences which go below the skin as an alligator would be. Society, with more or less expenditure of emotion, hangs these people, as a rule. The most finished of philanthropists will kill a cobra or a whipsnake if he have the chance and the courage—and that, from the snake's point of view, is no doubt something of a pity. If he could express himself,

he would probably claim as much right to live at the expense of your life as you have to live at the expense of his. But he is in a minority.

There lived at Baden-Baden at this time a certain handsome and dashing-looking lady, who was admitted into the best society, as the Princesse de Grandequeue surely had a right to be. The Prince de Grandequeue was the present chief of one of the oldest and most honourable of Belgian families. People said he had made a *mésalliance*, and perhaps he had, but he had married money, and no prince can live in comfort upon two thousand francs a year and the age and honour of his family. The father of la Princesse had conveniently died a month before the marriage—he was not the sort of father-in-law for a prince to be proud of—and the lady had full control of her own money. Mr. Anthony P. Kain had made his heap in the best days of Frisco, and was supposed to be worth one million sterling when he died. His daughter had pronounced ways of her own, and was generally admitted to be charming but eccentric. She spoke French with perfect fluency, and the droll construction of her sentences was pardonable in a foreigner. Her experiences of life as child and young woman had given her so admirable an insolence and so fine a courage, that when she

confined herself to a foreign language she was not ill-bred. When she betook herself to that version of the English tongue with which she was most familiar, she could be terrible, but half a dozen years of travel had taught her a good deal, and she was not often terrible in her Baden-Baden days; never, perhaps, except under the very strongest provocation. She could smoke, she could drink like a man, she had shot wild boar on her husband's recovered lands, she could ride anything that had four legs, in her own way she was a rare woman of business, and for her heart she was a woman in a thousand. Her tenderness and kindness were not feminine but masculine in origin and manifestation, and, indeed, the big, noisy, cheerful creature was altogether manly. Nature seemed to have made a mistake in the physical mould.

Now, albeit that the Princesse of Grandequene was at one end of the society of the place, and poor little Mrs. Barclay was almost at the other, there was something just a little more than a bowing acquaintance between them. When Letitia had first reached Baden, she had been full of the delight of marriage, and her scoundrel of a husband had not yet been particularly cruel, so that she used to drive about with him at times in such a state of beaming complacency

that her happiness was noticeable to anybody who had eyes to see. The Princess used to see her at these times, and admired her almost as a man would have done. Letitia's plump prettiness and kittenish helplessness were so far away from the Princess's own style of beauty and of nature that they invited her as they had in their time invited masculine admirers. Then, when it became known that her husband ill-used her, the Princess was very much disposed to cowhide him, and was only held back from that good deed by the reflection that the after-state of the little woman would be worse than the first. A muscular and manly-minded Princess could not always be found to check the Major's little irregularities, and a solitary discipline would have been worse than useless.

The Princess of Grandequeue had so often expressed her interest in Mrs. Barclay that all her little crowd of courtiers knew of it, and she used to get the news about her. On such and such a morning, two hours after midnight, the servants had heard her screams and the Major's oaths and curses, and the swish of the Major's riding-whip. On such and such a day Monsieur Godin had been called in to attend the poor lady after a fall downstairs, which she herself proclaimed accidental, though the servants swore that her husband had kicked

her the length of the landing, and had promised to add murder to the list of his accomplishments. (One of the two women spoke English, and had been engaged on that account.) The horribly shameful list of the Major's cruelties went on growing from day to day, but nobody interfered because nobody had a right to interfere. When at length he went away it was currently reported that he had deserted his wife, and the tradesmen learning this rumour, as tradesmen in a town with a floating population of gamblers are likely enough to do almost as soon as anybody, Mrs. Barclay found herself besieged for small sums of money, and further supplies refused. She went one day without dinner, and while she sat crying her eyes out, as well she might, the servants gathered together such things as were most easily portable and so paid themselves their wages—a little in excess, perhaps — and left their unfortunate mistress to herself. These things also came to the ears of the Princess of Grandequeue, and that energetic lady set out without waiting for her carriage, and marched straight to the little villa. Letitia did not as yet know that her women had deserted her, and when she heard the loud peal of the bell she saw in fancy a sheriff's officer, or some such functionary, and lay on the bed in her own room,

frightened out of her tears for the moment. The bell after a pause pealed again, and then after a briefer pause it rang madly. Where could the servants be? Letitia, full of tremors, ran downstairs and opened the door, and there stood the Princess, who, as the proprietress of a Prince and a million sterling, was awful in the countrybred woman's eyes. I dare not venture on a description of the Princess's costume, but if you are learned in millinery it may be enough to know that it topped the splendours of the fashion of 1852. Letitia, with her terror-stricken tear-stained face, stood before all this magnificence and could not find a word.

"You poor little creetur!" said the magnificent Princess. "You do look reg'lar heart-breakin', I do declare!" She walked in uninvited, and kissed Letitia soundly on both cheeks, and the little woman's tears being stirred afresh at this, the Princess herself closed the door, and putting an arm round her waist led her into one of the first-floor rooms, and there let her have her cry out thoroughly. "Now you an' me's goin' to be friends for one while anyhow," said the Princess when the tears were over. "You cayn't be let live here an' famish, anyway, an' you'd best come along with me. I reckon your folks will be in England?"

Letitia said Yes to that enquiry, and in a little while was brought to acknowledge the present position of her affairs. But she would hear nothing against the Major, and would not believe for a moment that he had deserted her. It came out, in answer to the Princess's inquiries, that the Major was very wealthy, though Letitia had never seen his property or his friends and relatives. The wife did not know whether she and the Major had been living on her own money or on his, and she said nothing about the loan to her husband from her own estate. Her father had left her four thousand down, and an annual income of seven hundred and fifty pounds. If she lived to have children, the lump sum from which this income was derived was to be divided amongst them at her death. If not, it passed on to a cousin of hers or his next of kin. Before a Married Women's Property Act came into being, this was about as good a provision as a careful father might make for his daughter. The Princess knew what the wife did not know—that the Major had left debts, called “of honour,” unpaid behind him, and she disbelieved the story of his wealth. It was likely enough that he had not permanently deserted his wife—if he were poor, such a desertion was out of the question—and he would be back again for money, though

possibly he might shun Baden, wher his liabilities were heavy.

The first result of the talk between the two women was that Letitia and the Princess went upstairs together and packed up a prodigious quantity of clothing in three or four big boxes. The next result was that Letitia accompanied the Princess home, and the clothes being sent for she assumed a place in the regular *manège* of the Prince's stately villa. The Prince never resented anything the Princess might do. She was a model wife and he a model husband. She ordered and the Prince obeyed, or if he disobeyed kept disobedience carefully out of sight and hearing. This kept things smooth, and the felicity of the pair presented a wonderful contrast to the unhappiness of Letitia's experience.

There was nothing in the world more natural or likely than that the Princess should find her interest in Letitia's affairs growing with the exercise of her protection. It is pleasant to be rich and powerful, and to be able to protect anybody who needs it if you have a fancy that way. When at the end of a fortnight a letter from the Major reached Letitia, the Princess saw it and resolved on instant action. This letter, you must know, demanded that Letitia should draw immediately upon her guardian for the whole remainder of the money

then lying in his hands. This the little woman supposed to be about two thousand pounds, for before her marriage the annual seven hundred and fifty had not half been spent, and the saving would go to swell the original lump. The Princess cross-questioned her so that she had to confess the Major's original draught.

"Now my dear," said that decided woman, "you're goin' to say just what you want to, an' I'm goin' to listen, and when you've done I'm goin' to believe the thing that's plain on the face of this here blackguard letter. It's your bad luck to have got married to a scoundrel, and what's worse a needy scoundrel into the bargain, an' about as bad as they make 'em all round, I reckon. Me and the Prince have been a-talkin' about a visit to London, and it cayn't do any harm if we make it now." The lady had never seen London, and she wanted to shine there as she had shone in Baden-Baden; but the Prince would fain have confined his wife to continental society, where her lapses in grammar did not matter to anybody and did no harm. He was very glad of the Princess's million sterling, and before he married it he had been quite prepared to be laughed at, if he could get it at no cheaper rate than that.

But being a very decent Prince at bottom, he had got to like and admire his wife, and to be a little sensitive about her social shortcomings on her own account, and he writhed inwardly whenever a well-bred American or Englishman came his way. A lady of either nation he dreaded as he dreaded nothing else beneath the sun. The Princess never dreamt of this, being entirely satisfied with herself in her own mind, and reckoning herself, indeed, rather a piercing judge of manners. She had a reason, which her heart justified, for wanting to go to London, and she wanted very much to go, apart from that reason. "I shall see you safe down to your aunt," she said to Letitia, "and between us we'll take measures for your protection."

Letitia wanted no measures taken for her protection. She would have gone back to that ineffable rascal of a husband of hers and surrendered her last penny if only he would have pretended to be fond of her for a day or two. Major Barclay was a shrewdish sort of man in his way, and it was a little remarkable that he had no more sense than to beat such a wife as fate had given him.

The short of the story is that the Princess persuaded the Prince, who dared not refuse to be persuaded; that Letitia, who had always

been used to yield to everybody, yielded here; and that in three days after receipt of the Major's letter the party started. The journey was as unadventurous as any journey need be, but the young wife's heart ached and trembled all the time it lasted. The Princess had written a note to Miss Lucretia. "The Princesse de Grandequeue presents her compliments to Miss Lucretia Jones, and will call upon you in company with your niece about Wednesday." The receipt of this missive threw Miss Lucretia into a state of the wildest excitement, and for a day or two she could scarcely eat or sleep. The bare idea of a visit from a princess set her nerves fluttering till she could scarcely think. The note was not in the best epistolary style, but then the title was foreign, and nobody could expect the best English from a foreigner. The simple-minded untraveller woman was quite crushed when the Princess, in company with Letitia, drove up in a carriage hired at an hotel in the neighbouring town. She curtsied and said, "Bon jour, votre Altesse," when the Princess entered, and you might have knocked her down with a feather—so she was ready to declare until her dying day—when that exalted lady turned upon her and spoke American-English through her handsome nose.

“I’ve brought your little gell back, Miss,” said the Princess, “and I tell *you* you’ve got to thenk me for it. You let her marry *the* doggonedest villain I ever saw or read about. He’s spent every red the poor child had, and he left her out there stone-broke without a crust to keep her teeth from chatterin.’ He’s that flogged her it’s a pity to think about.”

The maiden aunt began to cry, and making a dash at Letitia, threw her arms about her with a thousand incoherent expressions of sorrow and affection. Letitia responded to this demonstration in a manner like unto it, and the Princess stood by well pleased, but a little inclined to cry also. When the first burst of emotion was over, the Princess, insisting upon not being minded at all, sent Letitia and her aunt upstairs, that the poor girl might bathe her swollen eyes and arrange her disordered hair; and when they had beyed her, the titled lady made herself perfectly at home, ringing the bell and demanding a cup of tea from the servant as if she had lived in the house all her life. The servant, who knew that the visitor was a princess, served her with an alacrity which was dashed with a little fear and trembling, and the good creature, satisfied at the present result of her journey, sat and sipped her tea in peace.

It was growing dusk, and the Princess sat in a half-light with her tea-cup in her hand and her back to the window. She heard the bell ring and she heard the maid answer the door. Then a man's voice spoke in softened accents, and in a second or two the door of the sitting-room was opened and in walked Major Barclay. Now, this charming gentleman saw well enough that it was not Miss Letitia who sat at the window, whoever else it might be, but the occasion was good for a display of that tenderness which made so large a part of him, and he pretended to mistake the figure in the dusk.

"Good evening, dear aunt," said the Major. "Have you heard from my darling at Baden since I called upon you last?"

"Yes," said the Princess, rising. "I reckon your darling at Baden's been heard of. You low hound!"

The Major at Baden had heard of the Princess often enough, and had even seen her twice or thrice, but he was not able to identify her in his wife's aunt's parlour, for he had never heard her speak before. Even when a man happens to be a low hound it is not agreeable to be told of it, and to find in a familiar house a strange lady who opens up the conversation as the Princess did, would be

embarrassing to almost anybody. He was a ready rascal usually, but this curious address so staggered him that for a quarter of a minute he stood silent, feeling stunned. In about that time the Princess—being a woman—forfeited the advantage her silence gave her, and applied to the Major the restorative of further speech.

“You mean woman-starver!” said the lady. “You low, gamblin’, drinkin’, wife-beatin’ woman-starver!”

“What is the name of your asylum, madam?” inquired the gentleman, when one swift glance about the room had assured him that the lady was alone.

“Newgate’s yourn, I reckon,” said the Princess calmly. “Don’t you fool with me, young man. Your game’s played clean out. If you want to know who I am, I’m the Princesse de Grandequeue, and you may have heard of me at Baden. That poor onfort’nate wife o’ yourn’s out of your clutches now for good and all, and if you’re anything short of a fool you’ll get—” The Major carried a stoutish walking-stick, and in his effusive entry he had laid it with his hat and gloves upon the table. The Princess advancing took it up and brandished it with a gesture which few princesses have learned to use. “Get!” cried the lady,

twirling the stick, and the Major backed before her. The hall bell rang again. "Get!" The Major dodged, and the stick fell smartly across his shoulders. At this he turned upon the Princess with an oath, and a struggle began between them about the final victory in which there could not have been a doubt. But for the moment her *Altesse* prevailed, and, abandoning the weapon, she set her big white hands well inside the Major's collar and banged his head against the door with royal vigour. The Major gurgled anathemas, and the lady went back to the verbal felicities of early days, and as a whole it may be as well to leave their conversation unrecorded. But whilst they both talked together as well as they could, and the Major's head banged more and more unfrequently against the woodwork, the door was pushed open with the pair still struggling against it, and a man in dark clothes forced his way into the room.

"What's all this about?" asked the new comer. "Thomson, show a light here."

It was altogether a singular thing to happen in the parlour of an old maid of rigid propriety like Miss Lucretia, but at this summons another man in dark clothes entered, and, striking a match, turned on the gas and applied the light.

“Thank you very much, ma’am,” said the first stranger in a business-like way. “You may let him go, ma’am.”

The Princess loosed her hold and fell back with her glorious bonnet on the back of her head, her laces floating in loose shreds, and the sleeves of her gown in rags.

“Major Barclay,” said the first stranger, “alias the Honourable Roland Chapman, alias Colonel Boyd, alias Captain Courteney, and cetera. You’ll take it easy wont you?”

Like lightning the Major’s hand went into his breast-pocket, and like lightning the officer was on him, and they rolled on the ground together. There was a sudden flash and crack, and in the midst of a little smoke the first stranger rose, alone. The Major was still, and a revolver was clasped in the right hand that lay quiet on his breast

## CHAPTER II.

THE Reverend Clarence Launceston was a young man of the mildest temper and the most exemplary life. He was not a very brilliant young man, but he was unaffectedly pious, and the Church was his natural home. His uncle was a bishop, and his father had the presentation of one unusually fat living, and the profession the Reverend Clarence had chosen seemed likely to be more profitable to him than any other he could possibly have lighted upon. But this was only a coincidence, and had not in any way determined him. He was pale and tall and lank, and he used to fast more than was good for him. It was whispered amongst his worshippers that he wore a hair shirt, and it is certain that he subjected himself to many unnecessary inconveniences in his search after a quiet conscience. The way to go to sleep is to *go* to sleep, and the way to get a quiet conscience is not to poke the inward monitor every second of the waking day with

the pointed stick of spiritual interrogation. Anything would become abusive in such circumstances, and the Reverend Clarence's conscience was disagreeable with him about things concerning which a normal conscience would not have wagged an eyelid. The Reverend Clarence treated his wretched conscience as the Chinese treat their wickedest criminals—stuck pins in it to keep it awake. It kept awake, and was about as useful a guide as a teething baby would have been, and just as fractious.

The lank young man had never done anything wickeder than to steal the sugar in his childhood, but he took a sort of humble pride in thinking himself the chief of sinners. His sins—such as they were, poor things—culminated or seemed to culminate on a certain Sunday, when a pretty pale little lady, who was a stranger to the congregation, took her seat at the beginning of the morning service just under the Reverend Clarence's nose. The young man thought that she was very pleasing to look at, and his conscience caught him at it and yelped at him as an ill-conditioned terrier who flies out of his kennel to frighten a passing baby. The heinous thought came back again with "*Venite exultemus*," and he intoned "*Let us heartily*

rejoice," in a lugubrious howl of devotion and repentance. The terrible sinful fancy recurred with the second collect, and he looked at the pretty pale face twice during the Litany. Conscience, thoroughly out of temper, with every nerve on edge for want of sleep, ordered him to go without his dinner as a penance for this unheard-of wickedness. He was very ill all the afternoon as a natural consequence, and looked so ghastly at the evening service that there was scarcely a single young lady in the congregation who would not have married him on the morrow by special license. He looked at the pretty pale face once more—for it was there again—and as a further penance for this further crime he went to bed without his supper, and endured such pangs of hunger in the night that he got up and made a surreptitious meal so hastily that he brought on a bad attack of indigestion.

The Reverend Clarence Launceston was a firm believer in the necessity of the celibacy of the clergy, and had been terribly confirmed in this faith by the fact that his charming cousin Julia had jilted him. It is not unusual for young people of both sexes to confound opinion and experience in that sort of way. The owner of the pale pretty face coming with

great regularity to church began to disturb the young man's opinion, and he read the Fathers diligently for guidance. The Fathers were divided on this as on most other matters, and whenever the searcher after truth found an argument in favour of clerical celibacy it seemed to him a little feeble, whilst the clearness, directness, and force of passages in an opposite direction were quite refreshing to the intellect.

The Reverend Clarence's vicar carried war into the realms of darkness by the propagation of tea-parties, and the owner of the pretty pale face came to these also, and every time the Curate saw her he thought less of the opinions of those amongst the Fathers who stood out for the celibacy of the clergy, and more of those who declared it a device of Satan. It got to be noticed in the course of about a twelvemonth—for nothing was done precipitately—that the Curate and Miss Jones seemed to have a decided leaning towards each other. The pallor of the pretty face was by this time much less noticeable, and the Curate, if nobody else, had seen its roses in full bloom. A change for the better began to declare itself in the young man's personal aspect. He looked much less cadaverous than of old, and excited accordingly much less sympathy and spiritual reverence in the breasts

of the single ladies of the church in which he officiated. The legend of the hair shirt was discredited, and the Curate took his meals with a regularity which would have shocked him in more spiritual days. Miss Jones—whose Christian name, by the way, was Letitia—had a nice little competency of her own, and kept house in a very pretty unostentatious style, in companionship with a maiden aunt whose name was Lucretia. There were several spiritually-minded elderly virgins in the congregation of the church who were sure that Miss Jones was designing, and that her pretence of Christian fervour was a sham; but the plain truth of the matter (though nobody in that neighbourhood knew it, or had reason to guess it) was that the poor child had an awful tragedy behind her, and that she had really run to the Church for shelter from her troubles. It is not everybody who can live on spiritual raptures, and Miss Jones was not born to be a member of minorities. She sought consolation at the hands of the servant of the Church, and received it at the hands of the Reverend Clarence Launceston, which was the same thing with a difference. In eighteen months these two young people were engaged to be married, and in another six months the deed was done.

Now, the reader, with that perspicacity for which he is remarkable, has doubtless identified this Letitia Jones who married the Curate with the Letitia Jones who married Major Barclay. In that case Letitia had no legal right to bear the name of Jones any longer, and she was so far following the example of her late husband that she had consented to bear an alias, though a sufficiently innocent one. It may be said at once that this resumption of her maiden name was a result of the strenuous advice of the *Princesse de Grandequeue*. But we all know what a dreadful web we weave when first we practice to deceive. It was natural enough for Letitia to try to hide that terrible past, and to dissociate herself from that most phenomenal of modern scoundrels, her late husband. Yet from the moment when the Reverend Clarence made his appearance on her new horizon she began to dread the result of her own action. When the young Curate first began to make eyes at her she dreaded the revelation which seemed inevitable. The Curate was really a good young man, and would without doubt make a good husband. The girl was impressionable, but she was not made of the stuff which long retains an impression when the stamp has been removed. If the Major had been but a passable

villain she would have clung to him and loved him in spite of ill-usage, as so many women of her type contrive to do. The Major being finally cleared out of the way, and the first horror of the shock forgotten, she was ready to love any lovable man who might love her to begin with, and would tell her as much in the right way and in favourable circumstances.

Letitia and the maiden aunt used to cry together at times over the wickedness of the deception they had practised, and they lamented together the impossibility of leaving the crooked path upon which they had innocently entered. When Letitia had first retaken her maiden name, she had never thought it possible that she would marry a second time. Her heart was in the coffin there with Cæsar, and she must wait till it came back to her. There was no harm in trying to hide her unhappy connection with all the Major's villany, and there were suspicions shrewd enough to have developed into certainty with very little trouble that the Major had had at least one wife for each alias, and that Letitia had no right to any other than her old name.

The days, weeks, months, went by, and brought some ease with them. The Reverend Clarence was a good husband as husbands go,

and each day of her married life would have been as happy as it was long, had it not been for the one weight which dragged her lower than contentment.

The fat living in the gift of the Reverend Clarence's father having fallen vacant, naturally descended to the Reverend Clarence, and he and his wife, some three or four years after their marriage, took up their abode at the Vicarage and lived there in peace for some half a dozen years or so, and half a dozen boys and girls were born. Nobody ever thought Mrs. Launceston a wise woman, but most people who were brought into contact with her liked her, and she had a heart of singular tenderness for the poor, and an open hand for the relief of their distresses. The Reverend Clarence grew portly and more High Church than ever in his ritual. His uncle, the Bishop, was very high indeed, and was accused of leanings to Rome, of which he was altogether guiltless. He was ambitious for his nephew, and when his brother, the church patron died, and left Clarence some three or four thousand a year, he had a talk with the younger man after the funeral.

"Clarence, there is a vacant bishopric—in the colonies. I have reason to believe that a representation from me would be effective, and

I am quite ready to make it on your behalf. It may lead to a home bishopric in course of time, and you would extend your field of influence. Without some such preparatory service, you are not likely to rise."

The Reverend Clarence knew that he was not particularly clever, and he knew that he would like to be a bishop, were it only a colonial one. He had always been a hard worker, and he was persuaded it was his function to do good wherever he went. So he answered with a clear conscience:

"To whatever sphere of duty I may be called, I shall strive to be content."

"The true spirit," said the Bishop. "Grierson is elderly, Clarence." Grierson was the Reverend Clarence's curate. "Horace is, of course, intended for the Church." Horace was the Reverend Clarence's son, and rising ten. "If you gave Grierson the living, the boy, in all human probability, would not have an undue time to wait."

The Reverend Clarence Launceston saw the force of this arrangement. The Bishop spoke the necessary word in the proper quarter, and in some two months' time the newly-consecrated Colonial Bishop sailed with his wife for the Carabrian Islands.

## CHAPTER III.

WHEN the Princesse de Grandequene went back to Baden-Baden she had an addition to her retinue in the shape of a baby. He was not more than two or three months old, and was still in long clothes, when the Princess introduced Master John Kain to Baden society. The Princess's father had borne that humble name, and the infant was set forth as the son of a poor relative of the lady's. Some people laughed at her for being so simple as to admit the existence of poor relations, and one or two admired her candour, but the Princess took her way unmoved by praise or blame in this particular. She used to correspond regularly with Letitia. The Reverend Clarence saw several of the letters and their racy British-American idiom shook him a little, but after all a princess is a princess, and a million sterling is a good round sum of money; so that in spite of the lady's curious forms of expression the clergyman saw no reason to step in between his wife and a desirable

acquaintance. When the glory of Baden dwindled, the Princess went to Nice, and took John Kain with her. The said John was a pretty and promising boy at this time, with bold attractive ways. He was a remarkably affectionate and truthful child, and the one lesson the Princess strove to teach him was to hate with his whole heart and soul anything that was false or mean. The good woman had no children of her own, and she watched John's physical and moral development with as eager an interest as if she herself had borne him.

Before the newly-appointed Bishop of Carabraria started for his see, the Princess, looking forward to a life-long separation from her friend, made a visit to Portsmouth, and there met Letitia for what both fancied would be the last time. She took John with her, and Letitia took such a fancy to him that she gave him her portrait in a gold locket (the little present being wrapped in a bank note for ten pounds), and asked him to remember her always. The Bishop of Carabraria was not present at this interview, but he was introduced to the Princess, who received him graciously, and wished him success in the arduous labours which lay before him.

Calliatonga, the chief island of the group in

which it was the lot of Letitia's husband to minister, had a salubrious climate, and the Bishop and his wife lived there in great contentment for some ten years. Once or twice in this space of time they visited England, and once a year they made a tour of all the islands. In London the Bishop was a personage of note, and the fact of a predecessor having been cooked and eaten by his flock lent a certain air of romance to his position. In fulness of time the English bishop, his uncle, died, and nobody was in the least surprised, and only one or two interested people were disappointed, when the hard-working and mild-mannered Colonial was appointed to the vacant dignity.

They had been away so long from England and society that both husband and wife found a permanent return to them extremely pleasant. A dissipated bishop would be a terrible object, and a dissipated bishop's wife would be as bad; but as far as the conventionalities and their own innocent hearts and straitlaced training would let them go, they went. The natural result was that they were highly popular, and since a solemn dinner was the grossest, and a sacred concert the most frivolous, of their relaxations, nobody found fault with them.

If there could have been found anywhere a lot of unbroken earthly felicity, you would have fancied that the Bishop was the happy man to whom it had fallen. His boys were steady and gentlemanly, his girls pretty and devotionally inclined; he had more money than he ever felt a need for, his loftiest ambitions had been realized, and he liked his life and felt at home in his work. And yet the Bishop's brow was clouded with a dreadful care, and a fear gnawed at his heart—a fear so dreadful that he sometimes felt as if the very thought of it would drive him mad.

He was in London on a May-day, and for a wonder the sun was shining. The town sparrows were chirping outside the window of his room in the staid and solemn old west-end hotel in which he rested. Beyond the short street which faced his chamber lay a stretch of green grass, and broad-leaved trees rustled sweetly in the wind. He looked at these things, and his brow was clouded as if he saw nothing of them, but gazed at some dreadful terror far away. A tap at the chamber door recalled him, and he cried "Come in."

"A gentleman to see your lordship, by appointment," said a solemn waiter, who looked more clerical than the Bishop himself.

"Show him this way," returned the Bishop, and the waiter disappearing for a minute returned with a middle-aged clergyman, whose face wore a somewhat worldly look, a clergyman who seemed to have missed his vocation if one might judge by his expression, which was hard and keen and habitually suspicious. In curious mingling with these facial traits was an obvious sense of his own merits—a flat contradiction, if you like—but there they were. He bowed to the Bishop, and then he did what seemed an odd thing for a clergyman to do. He locked the door with such extreme softness and caution that he made no noise, and, gently withdrawing the key, he dropt upon his knees and took an observation of the corridor through the keyhole. Next he restored the key as softly as he had withdrawn it, and came noiselessly, like a cat, to the Bishop's side.

"You have completed your inquiries?" asked the Bishop with a face of deadly pallor, and speaking in a harsh whisper.

"I have," said the new-comer in a murmur which was only just audible.

"Tell me the result at once," said the Bishop in the same constrained voice. His skin was of a palish green hue, and both his hands were laid above his heart.

"Your suspicions are beyond a doubt confirmed," returned the other.

The Bishop dropped into an arm-chair, and groaned aloud. The middle-aged clergyman stood by with remarkable calm and self-possession. One would have said, to look at him, that he lived in the midst of scenes like this, he was so unmoved and so uninterested.

"Beyond a doubt?" asked the Bishop, without raising his head.

"Beyond a doubt," repeated his companion, taking snuff.

"I can't believe it," groaned the Bishop. "I won't believe it. It can't be true."

His companion took snuff again and tapped the box with decision before putting it away, as if to say, "*It is true.*" Beyond this he gave no sign of having heard the Bishop's exclamations.

"I wish to Heaven," cried the Bishop, rising, "that I had never employed you—never seen you—never heard of you." The other was no more affected by this outbreak than he had been before it.

"That is natural, my lord," he answered composedly, "perfectly natural."

"It is such men as you," said the miserable dignitary, walking up and down the room, "who tempt wives and husbands to suspicion

How do I know that those first anonymous letters were not sent by you? What baseness is there in the world to which you need to stoop. A spy! a——”

“Take it easy, my lord,” said the middle-aged clergyman. “That’s not my form. I’m a little too well-known in my own line to find that dodge necessary, I’m naturally very sorry for you”—he made no effort to look or speak as if he were—“and if it relieves you to slang me, slang away. I’m used to it, God bless you. But I should have thought a bishop would have been above that sort of thing.”

“Can you bring me to the proof?” demanded the Bishop.

“Yes,” said the other drily.

“When?”

“Take it easy, my lord. You don’t want the waiters to know what’s the matter, do you?”

“When?” in an agitated whisper.

“To-night, if you desire it.”

“Where?”

“In the Princess’s garden at Knightsbridge. I happen to know that they made an appointment for half-past ten.”

“Here in London?” asked the Bishop. The middle-aged clergyman nodded. “What

duplicity!" moaned the wretched man, walking up and down again. "I will go and denounce her."

"No, you wont," said the middle-aged clergyman. "Not a bit of it. You'll take it perfectly quiet, my lord, or I wash my hands of the affair. Promise that you wont speak without my leave, or I have done with it."

"I will be satisfied of her guilt," said the Bishop, "but I will obey your directions."

"Is it your pleasure that I should make arrangements for this evening?"

"Yes, yes."

"Very good, my lord. Please be ready at 9.30. Good morning, my lord."

"Good morning, Mr. Latazzi," returned the Bishop.

"Sh!" cried the great private detective in a warning whisper. "There isn't a man in London who doesn't know my name."

"I beg your pardon," said the Bishop miserably. "At half-past nine?"

"At half-past nine. Good morning."

When a man is miserable he is pretty certain to see the worst side of his own miseries, and the Right Reverend Clarence Launceston would have been puzzled to find a bearable side to look at. When shame falls upon the lowly, its publicity is often circumscribed;

but when it comes upon a man of lofty position, the very pedestal he has been proud of lifts him into the unsympathetic glances of thousands of strange eyes. It was a blow to the reputation of the Church, a scandal on Christian living, that his wife should be false to him. Shames public and private crowded upon him and overwhelmed him, and awful thoughts knocked at his heart at times. And though Time's machinery seemed clean out of joint in these terrible hours, so that sometimes an hour shot by like five minutes, and sometimes crawled until he took out his watch once a minute to wonder that it had not passed, the moment of his engagement came at length, and the middle-aged clergyman with the worldly and suspicious face came with it.

The driver of the carriage into which Mr. Latazzi conducted the Bishop knew his business beforehand, and the two being set down at the corner of a street, the vehicle drove slowly away.

"Follow me," said Mr. Latazzi, and the Bishop followed. The street down which they walked, was dimly lighted, and on one side of it was nothing but the bare walls which fenced in the spacious gardens at the rear of a row of handsome houses. "Hush!" said

Latazzi, pausing at a door in the wall. "Step lightly. Not a word."

He set a key in the lock of the door, and turned it stealthily, entered the garden with miching tread, and beckoned the Bishop after him. Moving as though he knew the place, he led the way to the end of a laurel path, and the miserable husband, scarcely daring to breathe, followed him.

"There?" said the detective, laying a hand upon his shoulder and pointing through the darkness, towards the dim light which issued from the house windows, and was cloaked by the shrubberies of the garden. A woman's figure stood half-way up the laurel path, and almost as the Bishop saw at what his companion pointed the figure of a man came out of the shrubbery, and the two shadows silently embraced. Then with each an arm about the other, they walked slowly towards the watchers' hiding-place.

"I have told the Princess everything," the man's voice was saying, "and she confirms all you have told me. She knows that you are here, and when she has given me a little time to plead with you she will join us. The secret has so long been buried that it is better it should be buried still." He spoke eagerly, and as one anxious to convince,

though in low and guarded tones, and in his eagerness he paused within six or seven yards of the watchers, and they heard him clearly. "Your husband has no suspicion of my existence. Why should you ruffle a peaceful life by proclaiming it at this late hour?"

"You don't think, my darling, you don't think of all that I have suffered and all I suffer still," the woman answered, and the Bishop knew his wife's voice. "The remorse—the fear of detection—the misery of being held away from you!"

What was this? the listener asked himself. Did she long to proclaim her infamy? The next word struck him with a swift amazement.

"Mother! You must be ruled in this. The fear of detection is over long ago, and you and I can meet in safety as often as you wish." The speaker's arm still encircled his companion's waist, and they began to move away together as he spoke.

"What does it mean?" asked the Bishop, turning to his guide.

"Hush!" the detective breathed into his ear, and gripped him hard.

"What's that?" cried the voice of the man in the laurel walk. "Who's there?" Neither the Bishop nor Mr. Latazzi answering, he walked swiftly towards them, peering to

this side and to that. Suddenly through the gloom he sighted the figure of the Bishop, and, without a second's hesitation, sprang at him and seized him. The detective's hurried step betrayed him as he moved away. "Help, here!" cried the unknown, holding on to the Bishop.

"Mr. Latazzi," cried the Bishop, "stop here. I will continue this investigation in a manner more befitting my own dignity. Conduct me to the house, young man."

"With pleasure," said the young man with a spice of satire in his tone. "You're a tolerably cool hand, any way. Let me have a look at you."

"Follow us, Mr. Latazzi," said the Bishop.

"No, thank you," said the young man quietly. "I think I know a dodge worth two of that. If you make a part of this procession at all, sir, you will lead the way. I've got one of you, anyhow."

He had one of them, and the Bishop thought that the young man held on with unnecessary fervour.

"Lead the way, Mr. Latazzi," said the Bishop. Mr. Latazzi led the way.

"John," cried the Bishop's wife, who had so far stood rooted to the ground by fear, "it is my husband."

The young man dropped the hand which had been twisted in the Bishop's neckcloth, and gave the injured dignitary a chance to breathe.

"Letitia," said the Bishop, turning to his wife, "I know now the shame which lies upon you, and though you have hidden it long——"

"Excuse me, sir," said the young man. "You are not in possession of the facts. I am. There is no shame in the matter, except for my father—who is long since gone where no shame can reach him. Your discovery has only fulfilled my mother's resolve. But who is this gentleman, and why is he here?"

"My name is Latazzi," said the gentleman alluded to, "and I am a private detective."

"Did you set a spy on my mother, sir?" the young man asked quietly. The Bishop had never felt proud of his employment of Mr. Latazzi. It had seemed to him a dreadful necessity, but he knew that there were some men whom no necessity, however dreadful, could drive so far, and he felt just then as if he did not care to have his own course made public.

"I am not here to be arraigned," he answered.

"I would have had the knowledge of the

story hidden from you if I could," said the son of Major Barclay, "but it must all be laid before you now. Perhaps it is not necessary that this gentleman should be a party to our interview."

"Not unless you wish it," said Mr. Latazzi suavely. "Shall I wait upon you to-morrow, my Lord? *Good evening.*"

Mr. Latazzi disappeared. The key that had let him in let him out again, and the waiting vehicle took him home alone.

"Clarence," sobbed Letitia, "I have been a wicked, wicked woman."

"Mother," said the young man, "you have been nothing of the sort."

"Why, what's this?" asked the voice of the Princesse de Grandequeue.

"Clarence, Clarence," cried Letitia, clinging to him, "say you forgive me."

"Is that the Bishop?" demanded the Princesse. "Wal, that is too cruel strange? How on earth did he get here?"

"Don't ask that now, dear aunt," said the young man. "Pray ask his lordship into the house, and tell the story."

The Princess asked the Bishop into the house at once, and she told the story. It is not often that a bishop has a chance to hear such a history so told.

"If there's any blame, I take it," said her Highness at the close. "I'm the only person left, I guess, who has a right to claim a share in it. Her aunt was in the swim, but she's gone over to the majority, and the poor Prince was in it, off his legs, poor man, and no more able to fight than he was to scull against Niagara rapids. He's gone the same way, and he's answered for his share long since. As for this poor child," continued her Highness, pointing to Letitia, "the responsibility was taken off her hands. I thought it wise when I did it, and I ain't a bit sorry for it now. You'd prob'ly have left her if you'd known, and I'm sure she's been a good wife. As for the boy, here he is—my trainin'. There ain't an atom of his father in him except his courage, and I don't ask anybody to take the responsibility of his career. That's my affair. . . . Now look here, Bishop. Here's the tried true wife of nigh on twenty years. Air you going to make a rumpus, and drag all her old sufferin's into light again, and have 'em in the daily journals, and be p'inted at and talked about, or air you goin' to hold your tongue like a sensible Christian, and let bygones be bygones?"

"Come away, dear," whispered the young fellow in her ear. She looked at the Bishop,

who stood on the hearthrug with bent head and lax hands, and she looked at Letitia, who was sobbing on sofa.

“Bishop,” said the Princesse of Grandequene, “you air a high-placed Christian minister. Act like it.”

“Madam, I will,” returned the Bishop.

And if, in all the circumstances, it was the part of a Christian and a bishop to sit down by the side of a weeping wife and to kiss her in solemn condonation of her weakness and husbandly pity for her grief, the Bishop kept his promise.



BOAR-HUNTING IN THE  
ARDENNES.



## BOAR-HUNTING IN THE ARDENNES.

I WILL not tell you my actual whereabouts in this delightful country, for an obvious selfish reason. Honestly, and with no exaggeration, I believe it to be the most charming primitive place in Europe, and I do not choose that my advertisement of its beauties should add by one to the little crowd of admiring tourists which dribbles through it in the summer-time. There are already indications enough of its approaching fall into popularity with the tourist tribe. The railway has run out a branch from the great Brussels and Luxembourg line within the last fourteen months, and the inhabitants of the village are already talking of a Kursaal to be built in the place of the modest little Kiosque du Parc in which at present a travelling band of choristers sings once a year. We lie in a gentle valley (one of many, for the land is all rolled and crumpled into soft hills and dimpled vales), and the slopes which shelter us from

the outer world are richly wooded. At the moment at which I write the woods are in the fulness of their autumn glory, and the long level sunlight smites the hillside on which my window looks into unfancied splendours of gold and crimson and russet and purple, mingled with the deep, deep green of the unchanging firs. At a season when London is all murky and foggy and rainy, we have had two days' rain here in six weeks, and old inhabitants prophesy a bright November. I am not a misanthrope or a hater of my kind, but, with something of that inborn human selfishness which makes one's fireside-shiver on a wintry night a thing of joy, I reflect on the fact that there is no other Londoner within miles of me.

When you walk out in this delightful country, and the solemn splendour of the woods draws you up the hillside through long empurpled vistas, you find views which for quiet charm are not easily to be rivalled. There are no Alpine heights to impress you with a sense of your own smallness—a wholesome thing enough, at times, no doubt—but you can get an honest appetite and a reasonable bracing of the muscles out of our average ascent. And when the ascent is made you can see about you for many miles gentle wood-clothed hills, and vales of

deeper forest where no woodman's axe resounds. These far-reaching woods are the home of big game, antlered deer and tusky boar, and the Garde Général-Champêtre, after a six months' acquaintance, had grown to be a crony of mine, and offered me rare sport for the autumn and winter-time. Now, outside my profession as a writer of fiction, I have never killed anybody or anything, though within that demesne I can upon occasion be as blood-thirsty as my neighbours; but I am an Englishman, and therefore a keen sportsman to Continental notions. I know at which end a gun goes off, and I am even a decent hand at a rifle and a target, having been put through a musketry course in Her Majesty's service years ago. So, not being oppressed by any such fears as assailed the long-gamekeeper in the presence of Mr. Winkle, I set out one glorious morning rather more than a month ago with a borrowed double-barrelled smooth-bore, carried sportsmanlike under my arm, to hunt the grisly boar in companionship with a dozen sportsmen true and tried, commanded by and subvervient to (though we had a baron and one or two other local swells among our company) the Garde-Général. He, with a finger at his nose to mark a sort of confidence in the statement, sent round a

whisper that one of his henchman had brought news of the presence of the *sanglier* in a certain belt of forest six kilomètres distant, and with high hope we marched thither through the glorious lanes, where summer's full-flushed foliage had begun, ever so little, to incline to gold. The great belts of wood on either hand were silent. Not one solitary chirp sounded from the leafy screen, and that seemed and still seems something of a pity. But the Belgian sportsman, like his French *confrère*, is death to little birds. I heard last week, for instance, of one bold gentleman who shot twenty-one larks for his day's spot, hiding in a thicket and enticing the poor things with the flash of a mirror which was laid upon the grass. And at this time of the year we eat thrushes twice a day—a deadly shame—and very plump and tender and well-flavoured they are, the little French emigrants.

When we had reached the spot appointed, we all sat down to await the beaters. Probably acting on the principle of the bridegroom who refused to haste to the wedding because it couldn't begin without him, the beaters kept us waiting for an hour. They were a picturesque and odd-looking lot when they came. There were one or two pairs of *sabots* amongst

them, but for the most part they were heavily booted in leather. All wore blue blouses and trousers parti-coloured with patches, as a testimonial to the thrift and care of Belgian wives. They all smoked porcelain or meerschaum pipes and carried thick sticks, and every man of them wore the ridiculous stiffly-upright cap of the country. They had one or two dogs amongst them, one of unknown breed, who looked uncommonly like a sheep, and certainly went on legs of mutton as to his hinder part; a turnspit, with ample room for a third pair of legs in the middle of him; and another, half spaniel, half terrier, and all mongrel. The Garde-Général, with a finger at his nose, went round the sportsmen, and in strict confidence disposed of each; one to this post, one to that other, as if the places were state secrets. Then the beaters having been started up one sylvan road and down another, we all got stationed at our various posts and waited. I kept guard at the end of a lovely alley at the forest's edge, and, looking along the sylvan road to the right, could just make out the figure of the Juge de Paix between the tree trunks fifty yards off. Far and far away, after a long wait, we heard the voices of the beaters and the barking of the nondescript dogs. The Garde, passing with a hurried step to his own post, paused with a finger at his nose once more for a last word of

caution. "Fire at nothing but the wild boar or the fox." They shoot foxes in this part of the world, then? I felt as if I had a commission to kill a baby, and resolved that Reynard should go free for me. I struggled against my superstition, vainly. I could not find the heart to think of myself in the act of shooting a fox. There are men at home whom I could never face with a quiet soul after the committal of such a crime.

There is something in waiting for big game to break cover which imparts a sort of electric feel to a gun-barrel. It is less as if your own nerves tingled, than as if the cold iron had suddenly discovered nerves of its own. The stillness of the wood (except for the faint and far-off cries of the beaters) was a thing to wonder at. Blazing sunshine on the sylvan road, slant lines of arrowy light within the wood, not a breath of air, not a rustle of a single leaf not the chirp of a grasshopper or twitter of a bird, or even the hum of a gnat. Dead silence near at hand, and only that far-off halloo to give sign of any life within a hundred miles; the halloo coming nearer by slow degrees, and the gun-barrel growing more and more electric. Suddenly on my listening ear there breaks a sound as of a heavy body forcing its way through the dense brushwood.

I cock both barrels and kneel to make my aim the surer. If it should turn out a deer I am forbidden to fire, and I must wait until the object declares itself fully. The crackling grows nearer. I can already tell the very spot at which it will break, and I hear a voice, a voice of joy to me, an emphatic grunt, like that of the domestic porker in his drowsy hour of after dinner contemplation. "Ugh! ugh!" And then the crackling noise again. Now for it! There breaks upon my vision a fat and middle-aged gentleman, who fans himself with his broad-brimmed straw hat, grunting at the heat and effort of the way at every foot-step. "Bon jour, m'sieur," says the fat and middle-aged one, politely, as he passes. He disappears into the sombre wood on the other side the alley. If a boar had come that way within the next five minutes, he would have found my post unguarded. The revulsion was too much; and when the beaters came up after beating unsuccessfully, I was found sitting on the turf with my back against a tree, helpless and tearful and breathless with laughter. I am conscious that it is nothing in the telling, but my sides have ached over it.

The beaters and the nondescript dogs being again despatched by diverse routes, the Garde,

with an aspect more knowing than before, and twice as confidential, passed from one to another of his band, and, with his finger at his nose to mark anew the secrecy of the proceeding, told off each to a new post. Once more we found ourselves, after a quarter of an hour's tramp, ranged round a dense wood, and once again the far-off voices of the beaters rose and drew slowly nearer, and once more we came away without a sight of bristle, fur, or feather. "*Il ne va pas,*" said the Garde sadly, and we all sat down to smoke. Then I heard such stories of past big bags that all wonder at the barrenness of the forest vanished. But every man there being assured in his own mind that the place swarmed with boar and deer and fox, my hopes revived, and our interval of rest being over, away we trudged again to new posts, to go through the old programme of waiting with the old result. Then we came home, comfortably tired, and sat down to a table-d'hôte dinner purposely delayed for us. The hotel people politely feigned prodigious surprise at our want of good fortune, and did it so naturally that I began to think a blank day hitherto unheard of.

Business took me to England for a week or two, and when I got back one of the

first objects I beheld was the undoubted head of a wild boar, splendidly tusked—a trophy of a chase I had missed. He had fallen to the Garde's own gun, and had taken five bullets, charging with great gallantry to receive the last, and falling in quite an appropriate and befitting manner to expire at his conqueror's feet. I ate a part of the conquered and have no high opinion of him. It befell a day or two thereafter that a small Belgian boy, wandering in the woods, was frightened almost out of his wits by the sight of a herd of boar, numerous (if the small boy were believable) as Laban's flocks. Without troubling the *tracuers* this time, the Garde hastily formed a party for the morrow, and in the dewy calm of an October morning we set out again. We had an addition to our party that morning, in the shape of a young gentleman whose form, features, and costume are made familiar to the civilized world four months of every year on the front page of the *Journal pour Rire*. He wore a small hat of whitish felt, with a down-turned brim. A pigeon's wing was stuck gaily in the band. His coat and waistcoat, of thickly ribbed brown velveteen, were profusely besprinkled with bronze buttons, bearing in high relief the device of a horse's

head. His trousers were of blue, a heavenly blue, and he wore leggings and boots of unblackened leather. The heavily fringed game-bag, dear to the Parisian sportsman, depended from his shoulder, and fitted jauntily on his shapely waist. Being questioned somewhat sardonically by the justice of the peace as to whether he meant to carry home a boar in this contrivance, he answered affably that it was *chic* to wear it. In the course of a month's residence in London, this young gentleman had picked up half a dozen of our most familiar locutions and about as many catch-words and refrains of popular songs, which he quoted with genial irrelevance. Socially considered, he was a decided acquisition to our party, but he could hardly be said to increase our chances of sport, and he continually scandalized our leader throughout the day by ill-timed indulgence in dance and song. He was accompanied, in spite of the Garde's objections, by a dog, a beast bearing about as much resemblance to the English setter as his owner to the English sportsman. This brute in all his mis-spent life had probably never seen a spinney until now, but his owner was prepared to stake his reputation as a sportsman upon his dog's virtues, and as an Englishman I was appealed to as

to whether the animal was or was not a "settare" of the true British breed. I responded cautiously that he was of the proper colour, and the overfed asthmatic and degenerate beast was noisily caressed and encouraged on the strength of this testimonial. Throughout the day the "settare" lost himself in the undergrowth once in each quarter of an hour. His master yelled and whistled, and fired his gun to recall him, and when the brute came wheezing up, he was received with noisy demonstrations of affection.

There were only half a dozen of us, and we entered the forest from a road cut through it, and made our way as straight on as we could, at an interval of perhaps forty yards from each other. It was warm work, though the year was getting old, and the morning air was keen and invigorating. There was no track to follow, and the branches of the lower trees and shrubs were so knitted together as to be quite impenetrable in places. Immediately in my rear came a pale-faced youth, newly imported from the modern Babylon—a youth in *pince-nez*, who had in vain striven to borrow a gun from his Parisian friend. A casual inquiry on his part made me rejoice at his failure. On the chance of a snap at a hare on the road, I had up to that time

carried a shot cartridge in my right barrel. Before entering the wood I exchanged this for a ball, and the pale-faced youth stretched forth an innocent hand for the rejected cartridge as I returned it to my pocket, and asked "What's that?" He requested me afterwards to lock and unlock the breech, and said that the process seemed admirably simple and easy. He remarked later on that he had always felt an interest in fire-arms, and he seemed pleased to have seen a gun so near. Except for our footsteps and the occasional song and shout of our Parisian friend, we were in the midst of a dead silence, and suddenly, as we stood still to breathe, we heard distinctly the hoarse grunt of our quarry. The spot was likely enough to look at. We had reached a green division in the forest where rankly grassed slopes ran downwards to a marshy brook, and about the damp earth afterwards we found ample traces of the wild pigs' recent presence. The hoarse grunt sounded again, but nothing was visible, and no other sound occurred to guide us. By this time we had lost both sight and hearing of the rest of our company. We stood still, all eyes and ears, and suddenly in our rear there was a panting rush, and that beast of a dog came careering along

with his tongue lolling and his asthmatic wheeze sounding like a death rattle. Almost at that second there was a shot and a loud cry from the Garde, who had stealthily and silently stalked to within twenty yards of us. "Par ici!" yelled the Garde, and we dashed in the direction of the voice. The son of the woods had his finger to his nose when we came up with him. What was it? we demanded. A boar! Had he hit him? He believed so. Yes. Here was his track plainly to be seen in the long grass, and when a score of yards had been traced, there was blood upon it. We ran along upon the easy track for a hundred yards or so, and then lost it on the shed leaves and in the tangled undergrowth. Uncas or Pathfinder might have followed it, but we had neither of them there, and after hunting about ineffectually for a long time in the attempt to recover it, we abandoned it reluctantly, and having fired a shot or two to attract our companions, sat down to await their arrival. In the meantime the Garde, always with a finger to his nose, matured and set forth a plan. Two of us were to stay at that spot, and the other four sportsmen were to beat up towards us, from the far end of the wood. No sooner had the others arrived,

than, with a request to our Parisian friend to stay with the pale-faced amateur and myself, and a brief injunction to us both to keep a good look-out, he led off his party. In a minute he was back again with an expression of deep seriousness on his ruddy and friendly face. If the wounded boar should turn that way, he would be dangerous. Caution and coolness, then. "Ole ze forte, for 'e is comeing!" sang the Parisian with joyful gesture. "Ah!" said the Garde sardonically; "oué avez-vous étudié l'anglais?" "En Chine," responded the gay Parisian with a flourish of the untanned boots. There was a general laugh at this, and the Garde commanded silence with the unfailing finger at his nose, and led the way again. We waited while the sun wheeled slowly up the overhanging arch of steely blue, and shot long pencils of light through the yet dense mass of autumn foliage. A light mist curled through the wood until it reached the high lines of leafage, and then faded in the radiant tranquillity of the upper air. The thick-leaved trees, glorious with brown and green and purple mosses forbore the faintest rustle, and no thrill of song or flap of wing broke the almost deathlike stillness. The Parisian for a while beguiled the time with song—"Ee

loaf 'er, ee loaf 'er, 'tis all zat he can say;" but even he grew quiet after the first five minutes, and the cold iron began to grow electric again within my fingers. Silence for ten minutes, for fifteen, for twenty. The electric thrill had gone and come again, and gone again, and a tranquil idle lassitude succeeded. The place we stood in was like a landscape-painter's dream. The full flush and bloom of summer was as yet only ripened and enriched by the hand of autumn, and whichever way you might look, there were exquisite vistas, each one of them a picture full of sweet form and strong yet delicate colouring.

A rustle somewhere in the brushwood near at hand, and all notions of landscape beauty swept clean away. A low whistle—the appointed signal of the coming of our friends, lest any flurried sportsman should fire at a mere sound—and tranquillity returns, with something of disappointment. Then the stalwart form of the Justice of the Peace heaves in sight. "Est-ce que vous n'avez vu rien?" he cried. "Ri—" began the Parisian, but the last syllable died upon his tongue, and he threw his gun to his shoulder and fired. There rose such a squeal as haunted the dreams of the butcher's daughter in Holmes's touching verse, and out from the undergrowth into the open

dashed a great brown mass within ten yards of us, heading straight for the musical Frenchman. The brown mass was almost on him when he leapt nimbly on one side, and swinging round discharged the second barrel without effect. Piggy's rush, for he was here at last, had carried him twenty paces beyond his object when he turned again. Just as he turned, the judge and I fired together, and the great brute staggered and dashed on once more. Then came another shot, and the boar spun clean round like a teetotum and dropped. The gay Parisian ran forward, but the Garde's voice cried—"Au large!" and the warning was not misplaced. The life was not out of our quarry yet. He rose and made another rush, but this time three shots met him, and when he fell again he was still enough in all conscience.

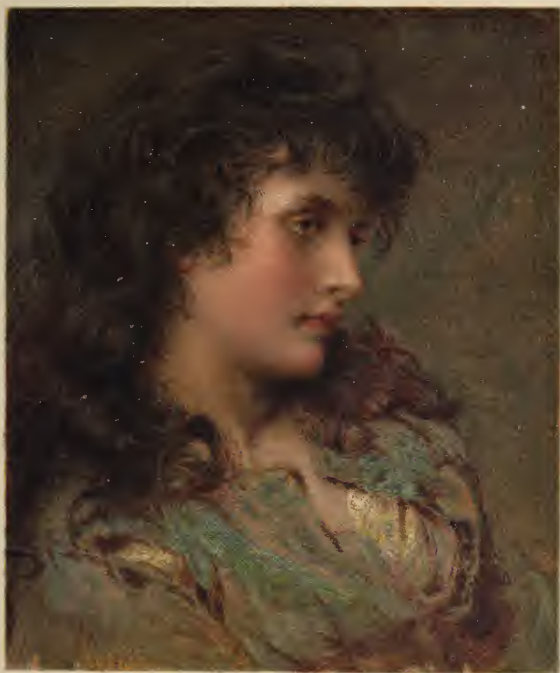
We left him there, and marched forth from the wood and struck the road, along which we continued until we came to a little *auberge* where we told our news, and secured bearers for the dead. A very sprightly old lady keeps the *auberge*, and while we sat sipping at Dinant beer and pulling at our pipes with a quite heroic air upon us all, the sprightly old lady told a story. Yesterday, said the sprightly old lady, she was cleaning her door-

step at about half-past five in the morning, when she suddenly espied a *sanglier* walking leisurely up the road. He had evidently been out for a night's ramble in the cultivated fields, possibly in hope of a discovery of turnips or potatoes. Anyhow, there he was; and the old lady calling her husband and her son, the three armed themselves with pitchforks, and intercepted his passage. And between them they slew him, and there was his body lying in a hut outside to prove the story, a body pierced with many wounds.

"Mais, madame," said the Garde, "c'est du braconnage." But what, asked the sprightly old lady, were poor folks to do. If the nasty things were ringed in the nose like the domestic porker, there might be a chance for poor folks' gardens; but as it was—There an appealing shrug of the shoulders and a still more appealing extension of the hands ended the address. "Eh bien," said the Justice of the Peace, "n'en dis rien." The Garde shook his head with great gravity, and talked about the divine right of kings. The particular forests hereabouts belong to Leopold the Second. The sprightly old lady urged that the *sanglier* had been found on the high road, and not in the forest: surely he was anybody's property there; "Eh bien,"

said the Justice of the Peace again, "n'en dis rien;" and eventually his advice was taken.

Then a cart being brought up, and the bearers of our slain one arriving, the body of the boar was hoisted in and we set out in triumph. The scene at the hotel was one to be remembered. A crowd of at least a score of people surrounded the vehicle; the gendarme was under arms, and came out to look on. The cook brandished a rolling-pin about the prostrate giant of the forest, and prophesied rare dishes out of him, and the sportsmen's wives received the sportsmen as if they had just returned from the successful storming of a Malakoff. I thought of the sprightly old lady at the *auberge*, and her son and husband armed with pitchforks, but that was a thing to be silent over.



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## MAUD MULLER.

MAUD MULLER, on a summer's day, raked the meadowsweet with hay.  
 Beneath her torn hat glowed the wealth of simple beauty and rustic health.  
 Singing, she wrought, and her merry glee the mock-bird echoed from his tree.  
 But when she glanced to the far-off town, white from its hill-slope looking down,  
 The sweet song died, and a vague unrest and a nameless longing filled her breast,—  
 A wish, that she hardly dare to own, for something better than she had known.  
 The Judge rode slowly down the lane, smoothing his horse's chestnut mane.  
 He drew his bridle in the shade of the apple-trees to greet the maid,  
 And asked a draught from the spring that flowed through the meadow across the road.  
 She stooped where the cool spring bubbled up, and filled for him her small tin cup,  
 And blushed as she gave it, looking down on her feet so bare, and her tattered gown.  
 "Thanks!" said the Judge; "a sweeter draught from a fairer hand was never quaffed."  
 He spoke of the grass and flowers and trees, of the singing birds and the humming bees;  
 Then talked of the haying, and wondered whether the cloud in the west would bring foul  
 And Maud forgot her brier-torn gown, and her graceful ankles bare and brown [weather.  
 And listened, while a pleased surprise looked from her long-lashed hazel eyes.  
 At last, like one who for delay seeks a vain excuse, he rode away.  
 Maud Muller looked and sighed: "Ah me! That I the Judge's bride might be!  
 "He would dress me up in silks so fine, and praise and toast me at his wine.  
 "My father should wear a broadcloth coat; my brother should sail a painted boat.  
 "I'd dress my mother so grand and gay, and the baby should have a new toy each day.  
 "And I'd feed the hungry and clothe the poor, and all should bless me who left our door."  
 The Judge looked back as he climbed the hill, and saw Maud Muller standing still.  
 "A form more fair, a face more sweet, ne'er hath it been my lot to meet.  
 "And her modest answer and graceful air show her wise and good as she is fair.  
 "Would she were mine, and I to-day, like her, a harvester of hay:  
 "No doubtful balance of rights and wrongs, nor weary lawyers with endless tongues,  
 "But low of cattle and song of birds, and health and quiet and loving words."  
 But he thought of his sisters proud and cold, and his mother vain of her rank and gold.  
 So, closing his heart the Judge rode on and Maud was left in the field alone.  
 But the lawyers smiled that afternoon, when he hummed in Court an old love tune;  
 And the young girl mused beside the well till the rain on the unranked clover fell.  
 He wedded a wife of richest dower, who lived for fashion, as he for power.  
 Yet oft, in his marble hearth's bright glow, he watched a picture come and go;  
 And sweet Maud Muller's hazel eyes looked out in their innocent surprise.  
 Oft, when the wine in his glass was red, he longed for the wayside well instead;  
 And closed his eyes on his garnished rooms to dream of meadows and clover-blooms.  
 And the proud man sighed, with a secret pain, "Ah, that I was free again!  
 "Free as when I rode that day, where the barefoot maiden raked her hay."  
 She wedded a man unlearned and poor, and many children played round her door.  
 But care and sorrow, and childbirth pain, left their traces on heart and brain.  
 And oft, when the summer sun shone hot on the new-mown hay in the meadow lot,  
 And she heard the little spring brook fall over the road side, through the wail,  
 In the shade of the apple-tree again she saw a rider draw his rein.  
 And, gazing down with timid grace, she felt his pleased eyes read her face.  
 Sometimes her narrow kitchen walls stretched away into stately halls;  
 The weary wheel to a spinnet turned, the tallow candle an astral burned,  
 And for him who sat by the chimney lug, dozing and grumbling o'er pipe and mug,  
 A manly form at her side she saw, and joy was duty and love was law.  
 Then she took up her burden of life again, saying only, "It might have been."  
 Alas for maiden, alas for Judge, for rich repiner and household drudge!  
 God pity them both! and pity us all, who vainly the dreams of youth recall.  
 For of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these: "It might have been."  
 Ah, well! for us all some sweet hope lies deeply buried from human eyes;  
 And, in the hereafter, angels may roll the stone from its grave away!

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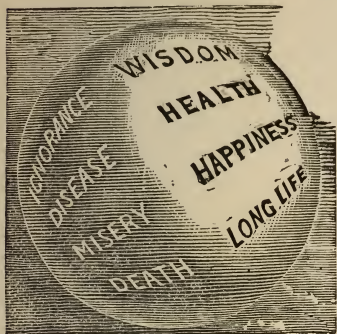
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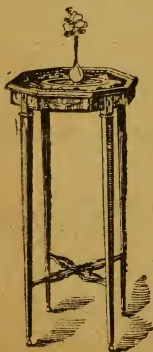
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